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SAM'S SWEETHEART

BY

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'COMIN' THRO' THE RYE,' 'CHERRY RIPE!'

'LAND O' THE LEAL,'

ETC., ETC.

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SAM'S SWEETHEART.

CHAPTER XIII.

And pale, pale grey her rosy cheek,
That was sae bright o' blee;
And she seemed to be as surely dead
As any one could be.

In the strict sense of the word there is no such thing as marriage among the Australian aborigines.

The preliminaries that precede the binding of men to women cannot be called rites, and the ceremony itself is a simple matter of exchange, the bridegroom supplying a sister, cousin, or other female relation as wife to the nearest male relation, and bestower of the bride.

Very rarely a woman is obtained by con-

quest, and no happier, perhaps, than if she had been wedded by barter, though occasionally a fat woman's charms will so fire surrounding camps that eventually, and in spite of the closest guarding, she will be stolen, and a constant source of peril removed from her legal owner, to an illegal one. Now and then a man who has no sister, or near feminine belonging whom he can barter in exchange for a wife, will in desperation steal one; but this is invariably a cause of bloodshed, from which an honourable aborigine shrinks; he feels, moreover, like a thief, and is degraded in his own eyes and those of his tribe.

The marriage first, the wooing after—such is the rule of these curious weddings, and loud are the whacks, thumps, and outcries that make night hideous when the unwilling bride is dragged home by a man she has probably never set eyes on till that moment, while her heart remains behind with some young chief of her own tribe,

who loves her, but dares not ward off one blow from her bleeding head.

The wailing cry of the girl's mother as she beats her breast, and utters the mournful wail of Lathì! Lathì! intensifies the sadness of the situation, and makes the onlooker think with fear of the wretched fate before the unwilling bride; yet perhaps through the simple operation of having sense dinned into her skull by means of hard knocks, these girls usually become contented, and even happy wives to the men whose wooing began so roughly.

Now in this approaching marriage of Yuntha and Djarrah there were circumstances that removed it altogether from the common run of marriages, so that every soul in the camp was ready at the first blink of daylight to get up and witness it.

In the first place, it was to take place by day, when night was the only legal, respectable time for such a business; in the second, it was to be contracted by cousins,

and no aborigine in his senses ever dreamed of marrying a woman of his own tribe, no matter what might be his secret philanderings with the fair ones of his every-day acquaintance.

It was only by special permission of the chiefs that this difficulty was overlooked, but a still greater existed in the fact that Djarrah had no near female relative to furnish in exchange for Yuntha, and without that necessary article of barter in his hand, not even the dying commands of Monana could have made the young pair man and wife.

But here, again, the hitch was overcome by the discovery of a poor relation of his father's verging on sixty, who had been rejected by all buyers as loathsome to the sight, but now to be presented to the chief who was the donor of Yuntha with as much politeness as if she were Venus herself.

Perhaps neither did this secondary pair pass the night very pleasantly, for the

prospective bridegroom had already three wives, and the elderly bride no taste for those blows (more of distaste than love) that would signal her departure to his miam. The women had drawn together in angry muttering groups with the first stroke of dawn, and threw bitter looks of hatred towards the miam in which Yuntha had at last sunk to a troubled slumber. Not a living one of them but would have gone gladly with the white man at the holding up of his finger; for the female aborigine loves the pale-face just as passionately as her lover or husband hates him, and having once been ever so lightly loved by him, turns with loathing from the love of her own race ever after. But Djarrah was more beautiful than even a white man could be, and many a woman now present had stifled the love that the mere sight of him provoked, only to see him lavish his whole soul on Yuntha, who valued his gold as silver, and fled from him

the first moment that temptation touched her.

Djarrah's generosity in contriving the white man's escape, his bravery in defending, and covering the retreat of the guilty pair, his courage in returning to the camp, and the fortitude with which he bore his blindness, all these things made him noble in the women's eyes, and more bitter against the girl who had crowned all her sins by catching the very hue of the man she had run away with, and becoming white.

This change in her was by some attributed to the witchcraft of Monana, who, since the girl's elopement, hated her; but others, remembering how long had been Yuntha's daily toilette ceremonies, believed that she had deliberately practised a fraud upon the tribe from the time that she was able to choose between right or wrong.

Some of the women present remembered her mother's flight from the camp pursued

by her family, and how they came back alone and silent, none knowing if she had been speared, or killed, or dragged away to the husband from whom she had tried to escape.

Others again remembered a young child brought in haste to the camp one day by Monana, but none could swear if it had been white or brown, so swiftly had the old woman retired with it into her miam, but after some days when it came forth, the child was like any other in the camp, only its hair was soft as silk, and its limbs and features beautiful beyond belief.

Yuntha had never been at one with the other girls and women, never exchanged confidences with them, or taken interest in those gewgaws or adornments that they loved—and in turn they had hated the suit of green that hid her slender limbs, and seemed to rebuke the nakedness of the rest.

The middle-aged man, Billy, had been her

chosen friend, the water moles her playmates — every dumb creature commanded her love, while to the voices of the human beings around, she turned a deaf ear, and went on her way as one who heard them not.

But now, said the women, she would have the animals, and the forest creatures to play with to her heart's content, for were not she and Djarrah to be turned out of the camp as outcasts, so soon as the so-called ceremony of marriage was completed, to wander like a pair of vagabonds who had no home, and no people, on the face of the earth?

They must bear with one another's company, for they would get none other. In sunshine and wet, summer and winter, through hunger and plenty, they would be alone, not daring to approach or share in any one of those ceremonies that to the aborigine furnishes his greatest joy.

Friendly tribes would be warned against

giving them shelter, hostile ones might be trusted to take their own revenge if they chanced upon the banned couple, and if one of them should die, the other would have to support that awful loneliness from which the aborigine shrinks with even greater fear than does his white brother.

'Did she mean to be married in her green rags?' asked the women scornfully of one another as gradually the whole camp gathered, but the mat before the bride's miam did not stir. The bridegroom too, would he not issue forth to be decked by the bachelors in the array that befitted the occasion? An hour after daybreak had been fixed for the bridal rites, and all were impatient for them to be over, since then would come breakfast, then the chase, and lastly a good meal, and rest after the fatigues of the preceding night.

The chief was already in his place, prepared to give Yuntha away, and receive in exchange the poor old hag who had the

grace to hide behind her opossum rug, and groan as white women are sometimes known to do when offered up as a sacrifice to their kin.

The moments passed, the chiefs looked at one another, and the old men frowned, the women struck in their little sharp speeches as goads to the men's sides; but the grave of Monana, visible to all, checked the exclamations of anger and impatience that rose to the warriors' lips, and they kept their eyes fixed on Djarrah's miam, as the women their gaze on Yuntha.

The pair had overslept themselves—just as though it had been any other morning, and as if they had no sins on their souls to keep them broad awake!

They must be roused—but as it turned out, there was only one to be awakened, and that was the woman.

When Djarrah, who had suspected something unusual to be going on, without gathering its purport, found himself called

by a messenger from Monana's representative, he rose up at once, and stepped across the threshold, standing full in the sight of the assembled camp.

Even when led to the centre of a small cleared space he had no suspicion of what was coming, and stood anxious and at fault—not knowing if Yuntha were already present—or what the assemblage of people that was around him might portend. His looks convinced them of his ignorance, and gradually a murmur rose, then a word here and there reached Djarrah's ears, and in a blinding glare of light the truth burst upon him.

Meanwhile one of the women had called Yuntha, who came stumbling across her threshold with one arm put up to shield her blue eyes from the sun, for she was half-dead with want of the sleep into which she had but lately fallen.

When she felt herself led forward, she looked, and saw Djarrah standing at some

distance as though awaiting her; and it crossed her mind that after all they were to suffer together, but to the gladness that this thought brought her, instantly succeeded one of shame, and the last few steps to him, she ran eagerly and alone, looking up into his face, and with her hands clasped about his arm.

But his face might have been that of a stranger, so altered and convulsed was it by a struggle that seemed to be tearing soul from body, as he shook her light touch from his arm, and stood alone.

The man's wild, passionate nature was in the grip of a temptation so fierce and exquisite that for a moment he reeled under its strength, and had not power to thrust from his parched lips the cup of joy for which he had so hopelessly thirsted.

Yuntha his wife—to crown and complete the existence that he yet so keenly loved—to be eyes to him, to serve and be served by him—to forget the Englishman

who had already forgotten her . . . and she had always loved him, her cousin, and his worship of her must win a return . . . why had she come straight to his side and put her hand on his arm? How that touch burned

What were they saying? '*If either refuse, both must die!*'

Who had refused? Not Yuntha—he had stretched his arm to her, and she was leaning half-unconscious against it, so wan and woe-begone of aspect that she seemed fitter for a grave than a bridal. Never were a few moments of bodily and mental weakness more fatal to a woman than to Yuntha on this terrible occasion. She might have broken down without absolute ruin to herself any time during the past three weeks, but in this supreme moment which must decide the whole future course of her life, a profound and senseless apathy had drugged her as with an insidious

poison that already began to course like fever through her brain.

The illness that had struck down Guy, had seized on her also, but this neither she nor Djarrah knew, as with his mind made up, he drew her closer to him, and turned his sightless eyes on those around.

A murmur of pity broke softly from some of the women; unutterably forlorn and piteous was the attitude of this young pair, where the afflicted protected the weak, the latter ignorant of care or danger as an infant who slept without fear in its mother's arms.

But the murmur died as a chief advanced, and pronounced the sentence of the camp upon Djarrah and Yuntha.

So soon as the ceremony of marriage should be completed, they would leave the camp, nor dare henceforth to approach it, but dwell together as outcasts beyond the boundaries (wheresoever by summer or winter set) of the tribe.

These words reached Yuntha's ears, but did not pierce to her brain; they were part of the rites that were to end with her death, and she longed for the sleep that had been denied her for so many days and nights, and only vaguely wondered if Djarrah would sleep also.

Perhaps she really slept then, with Djarrah's strong arm around her, but was rudely wakened by the clutch of a hand in her long hair, and found herself being dragged rapidly along by the chief, who grasped a waddy with which to strike her if she attempted to disobey.

Supposing that she was going to death, the girl did not attempt to resist, but went stumbling forward, followed by the exclamations and cries, some of hate, others pitiful, of the women, while the dogs barked and whined as is their wont at a marriage or a burial.

To Yuntha the way seemed long before she was suffered to stop, and then was

flung violently upon the ground, and opened her eyes to find herself in a large hut that had been hurriedly built by the bachelors of the camp in the night, far beyond the boundaries of the camp, and in which Djarrah now stood waiting to receive her.

She put her burning hand in his, and when they bade her sit down beside him, did so willingly, and with her head to his shoulder fell into a deep slumber. She saw neither the old hag who came and squatted at her side, nor the old bridegroom who grimly surveyed the prospective sharer of his wedded joys; the curious faces of the women who looked in at the open door were dark to her, and she knew nothing but that she was permitted to rest, and that Djarrah was beside her. Without, the jocund voices of the forest rose, but within the hut was a silence as of death, and rigid, ghastly, with each nerve and muscle strained to its utmost tension, sat Djarrah, the storm of a longer and

fiercer battle than the one he had but now fought raging in his heart.

He was but mortal, and an angel's strength might have failed before such a fight as this. More than all, he was a savage, with the root qualities of the savage, and in this hour his passions leaped up like giants, and swept aside all the self-restraint that even civilisation does not always impose upon its children.

Would these hours of deadly temptation never end? The old bridegroom watched the signs of agony and exhaustion grow in the young man's face, and knowing the impatience of the camp for those unusual daylight rites to be over, cut the matter short by rising, and seizing his bride, who had fallen asleep, proceeded to drag her away; then, as with violent squalls and kicks she resisted him, smote her a blow with his waddy that sent a stream of blood flowing over her grizzled hair, and withered cheeks.

This producing no effect in silencing her, and being encouraged by the onlookers to further exertions, he beat a perpetual tattoo on her head as he retreated towards his miam, where a still warmer reception at the hands of his wives awaited her.

Those cries and groans smote upon Yuntha's brain through her slumber, she started up, and gazed wildly around, then saw that the hut was a strange one, that her own weapons and household goods were ranged side by side with those of Djarrah, as in the miams of the married people of her tribe, then ran to the doorway, and saw the gradually diminishing crowd of warriors, chiefs, and women, heard the shouts that are held peculiar to such an occasion, then with one supreme effort to understand, before the flicker of reason was drowned in delirium, she approached Djarrah, who stood apart.

He had covered his face, but as her trembling hand drew his away, it seemed

to her that his face was as that of an angel, and her heart leaped up while her limbs trembled beneath her, as she said in his own tongue:

'I am your wife!'

* * * *

Upon the heels of that vanishing crowd there pealed out a cry; but whether of death or life, of man or woman, of jealousy, fear, or murder, none could tell, only those who heard it, fled shuddering onward, nor once looked back, lest, as the ending of that ill-starred bridal, they should behold a sight that would haunt them like a dead man's curse.

Book VI.

AMOS.

CHAPTER I.

Mr. Trefusis Explains.

'A LETTER from Australia,' said the Rev. Amos Trefusis, as having read prayers, he sat down to his humble breakfast-table, and surveyed an envelope propped against his porridge, as a kind of salt, with which to whet his appetite.

It was a blustering morning, very early in March, and the neglected garden looked meaner than ever, with its starveling

clumps of snowdrops, and patches of crocuses that refused to open their breast to the biting wind.

'Perhaps a codicil has been found to Cousin John's will?' said the oldest schoolboy present, with a regretful look at his already empty bowl; 'and he has remembered us all in it—even that heartless peacock, Tishy.'

'No such luck,' growled the second brother; 'we weren't born when he went away, and if he didn't remember father, why should he remember *us?*'

'He must have been as mad as a hatter,' said a third hungry voice (somehow the voices of all the Trefusis', whether well or badly fed, were always hungry), 'to be alive all that time, and even when Guy was out there (what a shave for Tishy!), and then to coolly send off his will and documents and things, just as he was popping off, by a little black errand-boy!'

'It was a man brought them,' struck in

a fresh voice; 'a young man, who had walked miles and miles with them, and couldn't read a word of English—though even if he could, it would not so much have mattered, for he was blind!'

'And the lawyers didn't believe a word of it, but went back with him and dug his body up,' said the first speaker, in the cautious monotone always preserved by the boys when privately conversing in their father's presence; 'and he was dead, safe enough, but *poisoned.*'

'That black must have been a clever fellow,' said Cynthia, joining softly in the conversation. 'How did he manage to find his way to the spot—blind?'

'Most likely he polished him off himself,' said Tommy. 'Murderers always know where to find their bodies.'

'He did nothing of the sort,' said another young voice, indignantly, 'the poor fellow's wife was dying of a fever somewhere in the bush, and he had only left

her to take those letters to the lawyers—and he expected to find her dead when he got back.'

'Close fish, those lawyers,' said Tommy, shaking his youthful head; 'Guy only got that out of them by wiring a threat to go out himself, and ascertain particulars of John's death if they wouldn't send 'em.'

'Looks as if he wanted to go out again,' muttered another of Miss Tishy's brothers. 'Perhaps he fell in love out there. What else could there be to do?'

But this insult to Tishy's looks (however she might be out of favour) was not to be swallowed by her youngest brother, who remarked,

'Sooty, dirty creatures!' and applied himself with renewed vigour to his porridge.

'Boys,' said Mr. Trefusis, looking over his spectacles at the table full of turbulent youngsters, with which Heaven, and no special volition of his own, had thought fit

to provide him. 'I mean to say, girls—that is to say, Cynthia—I have received a letter full of amazement.'

'Like matrimony,' muttered Tommy, below his breath.

'Has Cousin John left us a fortune?' cried the boys in a breath.

'He has left us,' said the Rev. Amos, hesitating strangely, 'a legacy, not of exactly money—but—ah—of flesh and blood—in short, a young girl.'

'What relation?' said Podge, opening his eyes, and scenting danger to the disgraced Tishy, and generously on the alert to ward it from her.

'No relation, I believe,' said Mr. Trefusis, with a blush that he strove to hide over his untasted breakfast; 'a sort of *protégée*—a young coloured person in whom he had become interested—in short, an aborigine.'

The boys gasped all in one breath—Cynthia sat erect, and tried in vain to read

the honest face that had been clear as day to her since her birth. What was he hiding —what had he to be ashamed of—the dear old father who had never wronged a soul in his life?

If he had owned seven unlawful aborigines as offspring, he could not have looked more guilty than when, with the light of six pairs of honest eyes turned upon him, he found the explanation of John Trefusis' legacy beyond him.

'Here is the letter, my dear,' he said, pushing it across the table to Cynthia; 'you will learn as much from this as I can tell you;' and therewith rose, and made his escape.

'Such a shocking example to the boys,' he said aloud to his perturbed spirit, as he put on his threadbare overcoat and shabby hat; 'an instance of immorality that will be always before their eyes, and with heathenish ways, no doubt, and a scandal to the parish and the neighbourhood.'

Meanwhile, with the boys' heads closed round her like ants, Cynthia read the letter.

It was brief and to the point.

It said that obeying certain instructions left by the late Earl of Thor, they were sending to the care of the Rev. Amos Trefusis, a young aborigine woman, who was to remain under his protection so long as she thought fit, but not to be hindered from returning to her own country should she desire to do so.

'So they take us for lodging-house keepers,' said Sharer, with a snort of indignation, '"as long as she sees fit" indeed—pray what authority will father or any of us have over her?'

'A half-bred black and tan,' hummed Tommy, to whom London airs were not unknown, 'and a fine lot she'll cost to keep—well, she'll have to take a bite out of *us* when she is hungry, butcher's meat being scarce hereabouts.'

'Do be quiet!' cried Cynthia, vigorously using her elbows on the encroaching countenances around. 'You needn't alarm yourselves about butcher's meat, for she brings money—the lawyers enclose father a draft bill for a thousand pounds.'

A thousand pounds! The boys retreated in a body, their mouths and eyes opening in concert, then Sharer exclaimed, 'Why, even a savage can't eat that!'

'She was to start by the mail that followed this letter,' concluded Cynthia, 'and as it has been some time reaching us (for the postman mislaid it, and only found it stuck to some beeswax in his pocket this morning) she may be here any day—to-day even.'

'Then we will meet every train—to be sure there's only one a day—we shall just have time to catch it as we come from school. You'd better not come with us, old girl,' and Tommy patted his sister's shoulder heavily, 'and don't let father come either; she's

sure not to have got any clothes on, and it might shock him.'

'But where will she sleep?' said Cynthia, on household cares intent; 'in a barn, or under a tree, or on the roof?'

'We'll fix her up a hammock in the attic,' said Tommy, nodding, 'then she can get out on the roof, and play with the cats at night without disturbing us; but mind you lock your door at night, Cinders, for savages have an awkward knack of killing folks after dark. Suppose we take a blanket to the station with us?' cogitated Tommy; 'of course, *we* don't mind, but father might be upset if she walked in with only a pair of boots and a bead necklace on!'

'Stuff!' said Podge, with great contempt, 'she wouldn't be allowed to travel so. She'd be suppressed by Act of Parliament. Of course the lawyers dressed her before she started, and forbade her to take her clothes off till she got here!'

'There's something here about an outfit,'

said Cynthia, referring to the letter. 'Here it is—and—yes—here's her name.'

'Do savages have names?' said Miggs, doubtfully. 'Well, it's sure to be something unpronounceable—Kitchy-Kitchy—or something of that sort.'

'No, it's an English name,' said Cynthia, bending her head over the paper as one puzzled. 'It must be a joke, surely—her name is "Sam's Sweetheart."'

'There's a name to put on a luggage label,' said Tommy, in disgust; 'and what right, pray, has she got to steal an honest English name like that? Sweetheart, indeed! Only fancy father saying, "My *dear* Sweetheart, won't you take a little more porridge?"'

'Was Cousin John's second name Sam?' said Sharer, irrelevantly.

'For shame, boys!' said Cynthia, folding up the letter and rising; 'be off to school; and if you meet that train, and she comes by it, behave yourselves—if you can.'

This insult to the Trefusis deportment was resented to a man—or boy—and all five brothers stalked majestically out, and with unimpaired dignity marched through the shabby garden, and on to the moor beyond. But on the edge of it they paused; the five tall figures doubling up suddenly, and losing their martial swagger. Then they rolled all together in one heap, and Cynthia was half in mind to run out, thinking that this was one of those periodical fights that in a male community keep the blood and soul healthy and sweet, and hinder the breeding of any noxious thought one to another.

But in a trice they were all up again, though still somewhat crooked of walking, as though a joke still tickled their ribs, and forbade their standing upright.

Already the Rev. Amos's fears were justified, and the contemplation of the defunct Cousin John's a matter for exquisite amusement instead of regret.

All through school hours they went off at intervals into noiseless spasms of laughter that provoked more than one punishment, but all managed to steer clear of that awful 'keeping in' which would have shorn their reception of Sam's Sweetheart of half its glories — for that unaccountable feeling in their bones which every west countryman knows, had fixed the young woman's arrival for that very day.

So that it was with a rush and a whoop, that the five swept down the hill to meet the train that actually contained Sam's Sweetheart.

CHAPTER II.

GUESSES AT TRUTH.

A BITTER, east wind was sweeping the narrow shed and platform that Upthorn called a station, as the five boys burst into it, the magnificent blood, bone, and muscle of the Trefusis physique asserting itself all the more finely that no superfluity in the shape of gloves, comforter, or great-coat insulted their circulations, and fettered the freedom of thought and body.

The train was already signalled, but not yet in sight, and the solitary porter and apocryphal station-master equally invisible, so that the boys had no need to moderate the strength of their voices as

they speculated on the probable costume of the aborigine.

'A ravishing smile, and a bead necklace!'

'A blush and a pair of garters!'

'A girdle of scalps and a *chignon!*'

'A pair of three-and-sixpenny boots, and a wink!'

'An inward sense of virtue, and outward contempt for appearances!'

'A blue silk trimmed with bugles, and a hat with a magenta feather!' said Tommy; 'and when she gets a little more used to us, off they'll go—oh, good Lord!'

'Or a baby on her back and a certificate in her pocket,' said Miggs, innocently. 'Don't the female aborigines marry very young? and the letter never mentioned if she were married or single!'

'Stuff!' cried Sharer; 'if she's got one, of course she's left it behind. John Trefusis must have known father would never stand *that*.'

'Perhaps he looked after her education himself,' said Tommy, in a voice of awe; 'and though as mad as a March hare, father says he was very refined. Perhaps she'll get reading us lessons on bush etiquette, and turn out a Tishy in the rough!'

'Poor Tishy!' cried all the others, with a spasm of delighted mirth at the thought of her disgust at the new cousin, and then all five boys pulled themselves together, and stood upright in a row as the train came lumbering in, and five pair of eager blue eyes swept the carriage windows in search of the ideal cousin that each pair expected.

But no one appeared who in the least corresponded with either of the boys' expectations, and though they tore up and down, looked into the guard's van, and peeped into the engine, they found no aborigine, till angry with the bones that had so positively foretold her arrival, they desisted from their

search, and stood back as the train sullenly and slowly steamed away.

Having washed hands of their own affairs, they were able to consider their neighbours, and the boys' disappointed eyes soon fastened on the sole passenger who had alighted, a young slight girl, dressed in dark blue serge, short enough to show two slender feet, and with a little close hat of the same stuff on her head, but as innocent of veils, mufflers, and wraps as were the young Trefusis' themselves. The station-master was still invisible, the porter (knowing himself indispensable) had disappeared, so that there was nothing between the five lads and the girl as they stood at opposite ends of the platform, and looked at each other.

'Hang that porter!' said Sharer, suddenly. 'What business has he to go off like this?' and he stalked off to unearth him.

'Let's go and offer our services,' said

Tommy. 'She's going to the Castle, of course, and they've forgotten to send for her; if that beast of a porter's drunk again, we'll carry her box.'

'It's a pretty big one,' said Podge in a grumbling tone. 'Why you might put all the clothes of the whole family into it ——'

'Except Tishy's,' said Miggs.

'Tishy's looks, then,' said Podge, nodding, 'for that girl over there is a hundred times prettier than Tish ever was, or will be. Come along, what does it matter about our togs? We can look at hers.'

But as the saucy, ragged detachment advanced, each boy wished in his heart that he had got himself up a little to meet the new cousin,—not have come to meet her at their roughest, and so be caught by this lovely stranger, whose charms grew with every stride that demolished the distance between them and herself.

'You are for the Castle?' said Tommy, lifting his old hat, 'and they have forgotten

to send for you? Shall we carry your box, and show you the way?'

The girl had drawn her breath sharply as they approached, and she saw their features distinctly, they were so like, but so curiously unlike, some one that she had known . . . . then, as Tommy spoke, something in their appearance tickled her sense of fun, and she laughed right out before she replied to him.

'I am not for the Castle,' she said, 'but I thought that perhaps my cousin would be here;' and as though fatigued, sat down on the edge of the large black box, and looked at the bright boyish faces, that even as she looked at them froze into a sort of horror-struck amazement, as mechanically four fresh voices ejaculated, '*Sam's Sweetheart!*'

The name faced them in large white letters on the box—but not in the ship's log, nor spoken among the wondering passengers, nor among porters and hotel

keepers had it created such consternation as in the breasts of the Devonshire lads who stood stock still, and stared at it.

So this was the savage, and they were the civilized beings. They looked at her boots, then at their own, next at her exquisite clear skin through which the blood showed, then at each other's coarse tints of roses and milk, and loathed themselves, shrinking like the schoolboys that they were, within their shabby clothes. But Sharer, who had arrived last, recovered himself first, and advancing, said, 'How do you do, Miss Sweetheart?' adding, 'Our name is Trefusis, and we have come to meet you;' and he took her hand in a grip that warmed the girl's lonely soul to his on the spot, so that without more ado, and being some two years older than he, she held up her face and kissed him.

Now, though modest and backward in their opinion of their boots, the youngest boy present was forward enough when there

were any good things going about, so that Sharer had less than three seconds in which to boast of the signal mark of favour accorded him by his new cousin.

For the first time since she had left her home, the girl's heart warmed — already she loved these honest, eager faces that seemed to give her so true a welcome, and the cold, bleak air of this strange, inclement country grew softer to her, as three of the boys conducted her down the platform, while two followed with the box that had revealed to them her identity.

The station-master came out, and looked after them as they departed, so did the porter who had correctly gauged the weight of that black box, and concluded that the sixpence which was the utmost that a Trefusis, or the guest of a Trefusis, could afford, was not worth the backache earned by conveying it over three miles of country in which the roads were dimly guessed at, not made. The three in the

foreground had the best of it, concluded the two who toiled after with the box, too much winded with its weight to hazard a guess at its contents, till Sam's Sweetheart, missing their steps behind her, looked back to see it balanced at either end by a boy who blew out great breaths as a cherub does his trumpet, but with scarcely so fine an effect, or so good a grace.

'Is it so heavy?' she said, turning on them a face that bloomed with a hundredfold the beauty of half-an-hour ago; 'let me help you;' and she ran back to seize one handle of the box. But box and cherubims alike had vanished before she reached it, and only the backs of two pairs of sturdy legs were to be seen scurrying away in the distance.

'How strong they are!' she said, laughing, and looking after them; 'are there any more of you at home?'

'There's a girl—Cinders, you know—and another sister, away on a visit.'

'I expected only to find one cousin,' she said, looking with a curious wistfulness in her blue eyes at first one, then another of the faces, that so oddly resembled Guy's; 'but perhaps my father had not heard of you,—is the Rev. Amos your cousin, too?'

The boys exchanged looks, and two of them began to whistle softly.

'He is our *dad*, to be sure,' said Tommy, recovering himself the first; 'the best old dad that ever lived!'

'Is he old?' said the girl; 'but father was quite young when he died, and I thought his cousin would be about the same age.'

They had been climbing a slope in the teeth of the wind, and perhaps that was why Tommy's face was so much more red than usual as he said, 'I beg your pardon, but if John Trefusis was your father, why have you got "Sam's Sweetheart" on your box?'

'He wished it,' she said, a little wearily,

for she was tired of answering the questions that her odd name had called forth from the moment that the lawyers, literally obedient to their instructions, had entered her name in the ship's log, caused her box to be painted and her linen to be marked with the letters of 'Sam's Sweetheart.'

'Why couldn't he have let you put "Trefusis" on your box?' growled Sharer. 'It would have hurt nobody. He didn't forbid you, did he?'

'He would have told me to do so, had he wished it,' said the girl, so proudly that the boys stared at her, then wondered to find something akin to tears in their eyes.

'Poor little soul!' said Tommy, pulling her hand through his arm; 'we'll take care of you, and let anyone dare to say the name of Sam's Sweetheart isn't as good as Trefusis, and I'll knock every tooth he's got down his throat.'

'And what am I to call you?' she said, laughing, and out of breath, as she found

herself dragged along at the rate of fifty miles an hour.

'O! you can call us "Boys" till you've got used to our names. By the way,' he added, stopping short, 'who taught you English? We expected to have to talk to you by signals, and that—that——'

'Hang it all,' said Ned, giving Tommy a surreptitious kick; 'can't you hold your tongue? I'm sure we must look a pretty sight more like savages to *her* than she looks like one to us!' he added, in a loud whisper that easily reached the girl's ear.

'Did you expect to see a black person?' she said, facing suddenly round on the astonished youth.

'Oh, dear no!' said Ned, with stuttering politeness; 'but not quite so, so white—we had heard that aborigines were brown—not coffee-colour, you know, but a nice sort of a light brown——'

'Like a gently-roasted apple, I suppose,'

said Tom, cutting short his brother's floundrings with much scorn. 'Don't take any notice of him, Miss Sweetheart, but the fact is, we didn't expect such a scrumptiously lovely young person, nor quite such elegant clothes.'

'Considering that we didn't expect any!' muttered Ned, in an aggrieved whisper.

'Or blue eyes,' said Sharer, walking crooked in the attempt to get a good look at them. 'Why we always thought Tishy's eyes blue enough, but they are downright skim-milk colour compared with yours.'

'My father had blue eyes,' said the girl, looking at the tall lad whose head was yet only on a level with her own. 'Have all Englishmen eyes like yours, and all your women, too?'

'The Lord forbid!' said Sharer, piously. 'Of course, it's the proper thing in our own family—all the Trefusis' are blue-eyed; but for my part I think a black or a bright eye lights up a girl's phiz uncommonly

well.' Here he paused in some confusion, as a muffled explosion escaped Ned.

'Sue's eyes are black enough in all conscience,' said Ned, in his fatal whisper, 'especially the one her father gave her when he caught you kissing her over the pigsty wall!'

'Let us run,' said the girl, seeing the fiery glances the brothers were exchanging, and in a second she was off, and running so fleetly as to be far beyond their speed, though they stretched out instantly in pursuit, she keeping her lead all across the moor that lay between them and the little ugly parsonage that showed about a mile and a half away.

The boys had never seen a girl run like this before, and were lost in admiration of her as they followed; but their minds were unpoetical, and they did not mentally compare her movements with the sweep of a west wind through feathered grass, or the swift flight of a bird across the azure,

as Guy would have done had he been behind her.

'English girls can't walk,' Tom said, subsequently, 'they jib, or shuffle, or sidle; but Sam's Sweetheart can walk, and run, too, just like a feather dancing to a breeze!' which last burst of admiration was received as poetry, and Tom unjustly accused of having stolen it out of a book.

When she had run a mile or so, going by instinct towards that distant dwelling, she saw at some distance ahead the tall, somewhat bowed, figure of a man going in the same direction, and as she drew on him swiftly, leaving the boys a hundred yards behind her, the man turned, and the girl stopped.

For a moment they stood gazing at each other—she at a thin, worn likeness of Sharer, he at the living, glowing image of John Trefusis in woman's shape, at about the same age, too, as when the clergyman had last seen his reckless relative.

For a moment he was too bewildered to connect her with the savage that his sons had gone to meet, but as the boys came up with a shout and a rush, the girl took his hand and said,

'You are my cousin, Amos Trefusis?'

He stood looking at her without a word, feeling his very soul blistered by the explanation he had that morning given to his children, then his hand closed kindly on hers, and,

'You are welcome, cousin,' he said, simply, and with patient acceptance of the truth.

Something in that worn, gentle face, in the thin shape, in its shabby, threadbare coat, or perhaps some inward recognition of the purity of his heart and life, touched the girl's heart, and she stooped, and kissed his hand.

It would be hard to explain how in that slight action there was borne in upon the boys' minds a question as to whether they

had always shown the respect to their father that was his due, and the mirth with which they had been anticipating the meeting of the two, changed to a feeling that made them walk on, soberly happy, towards home.

'And had you a comfortable journey, my dear?' said the Rev. Amos, in much the same tone as if she had come from the nearest village, instead of from Australia.

'I was not ill,' she said, gently (and her voice was a surprise to him, for it was her father's own, even in accent), 'but I was not very happy.'

'And your luggage,' he went on, feeling in no sense equal to the occasion; 'are they going to send it up?'

'The boys are carrying it,' she said, and could not forbear laughing, though her heart just then was sad; 'they told me I must call them "Boys" till I got used to their names.'

'Ah, yes! my dear,' said Amos, shrink-

ing a little within himself, and a faint colour stealing into his thin cheek; 'by what name are we to call you? The lawyers were a little vague in their letter.'

'My name is Sam's Sweetheart,' she said, firmly, but with none of the pride that she had flashed at the boys, in the blue eyes she lifted to his.

'Your father refused you any other name?' said Amos, in whose breast most unchristian feelings of indignation were rising. 'He forbade you to use that of Trefusis?'

'He forbade nothing,' said the girl; 'he acknowledged me as his daughter, and sent me home as Sam's Sweetheart—and I will answer to no other name.'

'What unprincipled selfishness!' said Amos to himself as he walked on; 'and in what a position it places herself—and —what am I to say to the boys, the parish, the whole family?'

For a minute he strode on, deep in

thought; then he looked down kindly at the young shape beside him, and patted her hand.

'It's not your fault,' he said; 'not your fault, and we'll try to make you happy—but it's a poor place enough,' he added, as he led her through the crazy gate towards the Parsonage.

The boys had already burst in on Cynthia with their amazing intelligence, so that she did not show any great change of front, when Sharer led the young stranger up to her, and in his best manner remarked,—

'Cinders, this is our new cousin—Sam's Sweetheart!'

Perhaps a vague jealousy for Tishy (she knew not why), or because the boys had all so quickly taken her to their hearts, while even Amos lingered before returning to his study, and looked kindly at the girl, made the manner of this poor, plain Cinderella a little chill, so that the stranger felt no impulse of love towards her, and neither

then, nor at any future time, were they two friends.

The great box had already been dragged upstairs, and the girls followed it, along the cold, bare passages, into a larger room, colder and barer still, with a little bed in its midst, a deal washstand, and a tiny glass nailed to the wall.

The stranger threw out her arms with a gesture of relief.

'I can breathe now,' she said, and went to the window, and flung it wide; but when she looked round, the door was shut, and she was alone.

CHAPTER III.

CINDERS IS JEALOUS.

POOR Cinders, who had been a mother to the five motherless boys who had pelted into the world so fast upon each other's heels that the eldest of them was not seven years old when Mrs. Trefusis died, who had washed, dressed, fed, and mended these tall, handsome lads (ay, and stinted herself and drudged for them as they never dreamed of), sat alone in the wretched schoolroom, a pile of unmended stockings before her, upon which her tears slowly dripped. Deserted by Tishy, put on one side already by the boys for a stranger, what wonder if that black, bitter drop which lurks in every heart, and can be

swelled to either a brooklet or a river by injustice and ingratitude, overflowed poor Cynthia's heart in tears of jealousy rather than love!

I think she only truly loved one woman living—and that was Tishy . . . Tishy, who had always danced while others piped, just as the boys played, and wore out stockings foot and toe as fast as she could mend them; for alas! poor Cinders! she had very early in life joined the ranks of those who serve and wait. It was too late now to cross over to the happy ranks of those who are served.

Her father's nature was strong in her, but those beautiful gleanings of his long life of self-renunciation which shone out of his eyes, and spoke in his voice, were far beyond the girl's grasp or comprehension, as she took up darning-needle and wool, and attacked the worst stocking before her.

The March dusk was drawing in, the

boys would not notice her red eyelids she thought, as a step came down the passage, and her eldest brother entered, four years younger than herself, it was true, but so much taller and bigger, that in thought gradually she had brought him to the level of her own age.

'Isn't she a little duck?' he said, sitting down opposite his favourite sister, his large loose limbs and grand stature in striking contrast with the bowed, almost old-maidish figure in the apology for an arm-chair, drawn close to the window. 'Why, we always thought Tishy a beauty, but where would she be beside her? Such a figure, such a walk, such a voice, such a manner, such eyes, and such clothes!'

Sharer paused as though overpowered by the memory of the plain serge dress and boots that had seemed to him 'the slickest thing out;' then, without a glance at the shabby figure bent over its needle, went on.

'I wouldn't give much for Tishy's chances

with Guy, if ever he sees her. Tishy would be a mere handsome dairymaid by her side. Why, her very complexion beats ours hollow, and we look downright vulgar when she's near—and that's the *savage* we went to meet!'

'And didn't you meet one?' said Cynthia, threading her needle against the grey sky with a hand that trembled ominously.

'We met a lady,' said Sharer, in contemptuous disapproval of his sister's tone; '*we* were the savages—as she saw quickly enough! Why, she's got tact, *nous*, go, enough for the whole boiling of us; and if Guy doesn't fall in love with her when he sees her, I'm a Dutchman!'

Cynthia's heart had been hardening slowly within her as her brother (the nearest of all to her, next her sister) spoke, then her pride rose, or rather her pride in Tishy, for she had no looks of her own to be insulted, and only felt those addressed to the representative of the family beauty.

'What does this prodigy call herself?' she said (she had nearly said *protégée*, but pulled up just in time to save her father).

'Sam's Sweetheart,' said Sharer, looking a little crestfallen. 'Didn't you see the name on her box?'

'Who was Sam, and who is his sweetheart?' said Cynthia, as she took her eyes off a stocking, and looked at her fifteen years old brother. 'It's my belief that even in his grave John Trefusis is playing off some trick upon us, and that she's no more an aborigine than I am.'

'You look far more like one than she does,' said Sharer, bluntly, who had not forgiven his sister for her coldness to the stranger. 'When she comes down I'll ask her—she is sure to tell the truth.'

'She is in the secret, no doubt,' said Cynthia, bitterly. 'How dare he send her over here with only that preposterous name tacked on to her, to disgrace us? The least he could do was to lend her his name, and

save our credit, even if she wasn't legally entitled to it.'

'Our credit!' said Sharer, in a tone of disgust. 'Where is it—at the butcher's? We never buy what we can't pay for. Among our friends? We haven't got any! As to the parish, if they can't put up with the family that's been bred and born on the soil—why it may go to a warm place for all I care.'

Cynthia's lips tightened as she held Podge's sock nearer to her in the growing dusk.

'Boys don't understand such things,' she said, coldly, 'nor do I suppose that she will—the awkwardness of her position does not seem to trouble her in the least.'

'No, miss,' said Sharer, with slow emphasis; 'and perhaps boys don't understand such things, and perhaps a lonely, friendless girl, who has come thousands of miles from her home to strangers, hoping for a welcome, don't understand them either;

but even ignorant folks may have their opinions, and I tell you that I am downright ashamed of you. I do believe that Tishy, however jealous she might be of her looks, would have behaved better than you.'

This repeated insult to Tishy's appearance was the last straw to the camel's back, and the girl started up, scattering work-basket, socks, and thimble in all directions. 'How dare you mention my sister and this —person in the same breath?' she cried furiously; 'the one will be Countess of Thor, the other is John Trefusis' nameless, illegitimate daughter!'

The two stood facing each other with eyes that blazed through the dusk, and the boy (I fear) said a bad word under his breath, and the girl's heart, through shame and jealousy, was fit to burst, as he seized her arm, and said with a passionate tremble in his indignant, young voice,—

'Just you dare to say that before *her*, and as sure as I live, I'll never love you or

speak to you again!' He pushed her away as he spoke, but both brother and sister felt their hot blood stilled, and stood aghast, as a slender hand stole into Sharer's, and a proud, yet gentle voice said,—

'Cousin, what is it to be illegitimate—is it a disgrace?'

CHAPTER IV.

Mr. Trefusis eats Toast.

'Tea's ready!' said Podge, (so called, possibly because he was the leanest, tallest, most muscular one in the family), rushing into the schoolroom; 'and Miggs and I have made some toast for Miss Sweetheart, and *buttered* it, too!'

His eyes dazzled by fire-light could scarcely make out those three figures by the window, but when he spied them, he pounced on the young stranger, and bore her off in triumph.

Never had she been so well attended; one filled her cup, another her plate, a third fished out a moth-eaten footstool, while one

and all watched breathlessly her manner of feeding.

But she only ate a little of the toast; then looking round, said,—

'Where is your father?' for it seemed so strange to her to see a meal begun without the head of the family being present, and Amos had won her heart and respect already.

'Oh! he likes cold tea,' said Ned, 'he's most likely deep in a sermon—poor old dad!'

Something in the boy's tone, not slighting, so much as negligent, struck unpleasantly on the girl's perceptions. She got up, and turning to Sharer, said,—

'Won't you let me go and call him?'

'To be sure,' said Sharer, who had been curiously silent for the last few minutes, but he led her away with an inward sinking—was she going to repeat the question to which Podge's invitation to tea had been the only answer?

But she did not say a word as they crossed the hall. Then as Sharer knocked and said,—

'Father, tea's ready,' she looked over his shoulder to the interior of the room beyond.

Somehow in that moment the girl got an inner glimpse of one of those holy, patient lives that 'only watch and wait,' who do their work in silence, nor in the stress of it, cry out for pity or aid. The farthing rushlight that flickered on Amos's temples and worn face, showed also the paper upon which he wrote, and the emptiness of a room that held no fire, or any sign of the homely comforts that to this man would have meant luxury.

'Presently, my son,—presently,' he said, not looking up, and the girl, thinking of how the old men of her tribe were shielded, honoured, delicately fed, felt as she turned away, the first tears rising in her eyes that had sprung there since her parting with an aborigine cousin.

'We've kept your toast hot,' said Miss Miggs as they returned to the dining-room, 'and Podge has held your teacup over the fire; but where's father? I thought you went to fetch him!'

'What have you been doing to her?' added the younger brother in a fierce aside to the elder. 'You've been making her cry, and she's as cold and tired as a frog.'

'Shut up!' said Sharer savagely, and as Cynthia, from the opposite end of the table, saw the five boyish heads clustered round the new-comer, her soul stood apart, and she longed for Tishy.

When the teapot had been emptied to its last dregs, and the unsightly loaf (religiously skinned in its progress round the table) restored to its trencher, flanked by a bit of salt butter the size of a shilling, the father entered, and sat down, weary, cold, neglected, — apart from the boys' voices as they surrounded the stranger, apart even from the stocking-mending in

which Cynthia had already sought refuge from Sharer's ingratitude. But the stranger saw, and a pang, went through her heart, as, putting the boys back, she went to him, and with her arms round his neck, kissed his pale cheek, and with a stifled sob secretly vowed to cherish him.

'I have eaten all the toast,' she said. 'How do you make it?' she added, turning to Sharer; 'and we must be quick about it, and butter it well,' she added, remembering Ned's words; 'for he is cold and hungry, and he must not wait!'

She had drawn the Rev. Amos to a chair by the hearth as she spoke, and now pulled him down to it, while Sharer had slashed a slice from the loaf, and every boy present longed to make of his fingers a fork to toast it. But a real one being discovered in the neighbourhood, burns were happily avoided, and an agreeable smell shortly ascended to the nostrils of the Rev. Amos, who had not felt so warm and comfortable

for a long time; while as to toast—hot toast—he had not eaten it for years, not since these growing, hungry boys had unconsciously snatched each mouthful out of his own; no, not once since his young wife had kneeled on the hearthrug, just as the stranger did to-night.

'Go and get some butter,' said the girl, giving Ned a push in her excitement; 'and who is going to make the tea?' she added, as Ned flew off to procure bricks out of straw. The boys looked at one another, and Cynthia, without glancing up from her stocking, said,—

'The tea is made; father likes cold tea.'

'No, my dear,' said the Rev. Amos, gently, 'I do not like it. Often I am neglectful, or busy, and fail to appear when the tea is hot; but I have often thought if you could manage to keep a little for me, without extravagant addition to the weekly bills, I should be very glad.'

So her father was turning against her

too, and going the way of the rest, thought Cinders, as she took up the teapot (newly baptized by the kettle) and poured out a cup of hot water.

'How do you make tea?' said the stranger, abruptly, as she looked at Cynthia's decoction, and pushed it aside. 'Show me, quick.'

The Rev. Amos was warming his thin legs at the blazing fire, and feeling the atmosphere of consideration and respect as comforting as it was unusual, yet with some vague sense that he ought not to be comfortable with a certain anxious problem in his mind still unsolved. When Ned returned with his gleanings, the tea was already brewing, and the toast made, and never was butter laid on with a better will than by the girl who knelt on the hearth-rug, and had much ado to keep her tears from salting it.

Cynthia sat apart,—the stranger brought many sins of omission to her mind. Had

she, indeed, in whole-hearted drudging for Tishy and the boys, overlooked the claims of the dear old father? The fire stirred by a reckless hand, blazed royally on that compact group by the fireside, and showed the Rev. Amos as its central figure, a cup of strong tea in one hand, a piece of toast in the other, and half-a-dozen young faces and hearts surrounding him, intent only upon him and his wants.

There were no loud whispers to-night, no doubtful jokes muttered just beyond the reach of his shrinking ears; a purer atmosphere had come with the savage's presence, a clearer light to the boyish eyes that to-night seemed only able to see things through hers. But the unwonted interval of relaxation and comfort was hardly enjoyed by the father before he repented of it, and, setting down his tea-cup, rose to return to the unfinished task.

'Don't go, cousin,' said Sam's Sweetheart, with almost a sob in her voice; 'it's

so cold in there, and you will be all alone—stay with us!'

It was the first time such a request had ever been made to him since his young wife had left him, and his lips quivered strangely as he looked at the young, eager face that in a breath comprehended, and loved him, then he took her hand and said,—

'We will make a little fire there, cousin, and we will talk awhile, and I will finish my sermon after.'

Cynthia looked up aghast,—a fire in March, and the outcast so rudely thrust upon them, admitted to the study that no one dreamed of entering save in its master's absence! What did it all mean? and had a moral earthquake upheaved the parsonage?

It was Miss Miggs who found the wood, Sharer who fetched the coals for the phenomenal fire that was presently roaring up the chimney, and investing the Rev.

Amos's study with a delusive air of comfort to which he was emphatically a stranger.

When the boys had drawn up two rush-bottomed, crazy chairs to the fireside, and marched out with an air of self-abnegation that had a very real foundation in their souls, the good man sat down patiently to that *mauvais quart d'heure* which had loomed before him even in the peace and warmth of his interval of rest.

He looked for a few moments at the young, exquisite girl opposite him, then rose and walking to a remote part of the room, unhooked a picture from a nail in the wall, and brought it to her, saying in his simple way,—

'Your father, my dear—he was the head of the family, so, of course, we all had a copy, however poor, of his portrait taken when he came of age.'

She took it eagerly, here was the same bold, forward outlook, the eagle glance that howsoever tamed by years had so fixed

her regard, here too she saw herself, save for the bright hair and fairer skin.

'Cousin,' she said, looking up, 'what made him turn his back on his duty, and marry my mother?'

The Rev. Amos jumped, and sat upright.

'Your father was very eccentric,' he said, in a nervous, hesitating way; 'but about your poor mother, my dear, I never heard your father had married her;' and here Mr. Trefusis fairly trembled, and was afraid to look at the result of his words.

'But he did marry her,' said the girl, simply; 'did you not know it?'

'My dear,' said the Rev. Amos, gently, 'if your father had married your mother, you would be Countess of Thor at this moment, instead of Sam's Sweetheart.'

'That was the name I heard your daughter say to your son to-night,' said the girl, looking puzzled; 'and then she

said I was John Trefusis's illegitimate daughter—what did she mean?'

'The lawyers should have told you,' said the clergyman, with a groan, 'or your father—it was not right of him to send you home in such utter ignorance ——'

'I came home to do my duty,' she said, proudly, 'not because I expected to be happy . . . and is it a great disgrace to be illegitimate?' she added in the same breath.

'The world visits the sins of the fathers upon the children,' the Rev. Amos said, sadly.

'What is the world?' she said, looking away from the portrait she still held in her hand. 'Does it love you, feed you, shield you from pain and heart-sickness?'

'The world is nothing,' he said, ashamed of his own teaching, 'but there are advantages to children born in wedlock that are denied to—the others.'

'Would any one despise me for being

that?' she said, her bosom panting, her eyes wild and eager.

'No good person would,' said the Rev. Amos.

'But a great person—a man who has duties to fulfil, and who does not run away from them as father did—would he despise me?' cried Sam's Sweetheart.

'The only two great persons (in the world's estimation) that I ever knew, were your father, and the present heir, Guy Trefusis,' said the Rev. Amos, grasping each bony knee with a thin hand; 'and they were singularly unconventional, and thought no more of a coronet than a tin kettle. But what great persons are you likely to know in England, my dear?' he added, with a faint suspicion dawning in his faded, kind, blue eyes.

'Is the heir a good man?' she said, abruptly, as though she had not heard his question.

'I hope so,' said the Rev. Amos, with a

little blush on his worn cheek, 'for he is going to marry my daughter.'

'The one in the other room?' said the girl, slowly.

'No, she is from home now. There is a portrait of her somewhere, if we can find it.'

'Is she a good woman?' said the girl, with eager eyes, out of which all thought of self had gone, fixed on the clergyman's face. 'Has she great influence over him, and will she help him to do his duty by all the souls put under his care?'

Amos drew his shrunken legs further from the fire, and sat staring at the girl in a state of bewilderment.

What could she know of great estates, of uncared-for souls, of all the machinery of flesh and blood, bone and sinew, and brain that works all the year round to keep up a fool's estate?

Perhaps hungry soul met soul, as across the hearth the eyes of Amos and the girl

met, so that in one of those bursts of plain-speaking that tell more than the most studied eloquence, he said,—

'Poor as I am, I wish with all my heart that you had been the heiress, and that Guy had been going to marry *you*.'

'Does she love him?' said the girl, quickly. 'Love will teach a woman almost all that she ought to know, and then he will learn from *her*, and they will be happy.'

'There is the difficulty,' said the Rev. Amos, rubbing his nose thoughtfully: 'she doesn't seem to love him, or he her, and why they are going to get married passes my comprehension.'

'She loved somebody else?' said the girl, drawing on her experiences for a parallel to Tishy's case.

'Well,' said Amos, 'there was a young man, he was not very rich, but I fancy she loved him. I often found them sitting about under the gooseberry-bushes to-

gether, and there were other signs, my dear; and though he was almost as poor as we are, I think she would have been happier in the end if she had taken him, instead of Guy.' The girl glanced round the miserable room, and reverenced more than ever the man opposite her, as he added, 'I would rather see my daughter happy than a great lady. We have rubbed along here somehow these twenty years, and I could not take alms even from one of my children, and the boys will be able to work soon, and so reduce the simple expenditure. They are good boys,' he said, with a ring of pride in his voice; 'I have brought them up, not to what they might be some day, but to what they are. Their poor mother gave a fine name to each—family names all of them—but I insisted on a simple one being added, and now they are plain Sharer, Tom, Ned, Jim, and Jack, though I regret that absurd nicknames have been introduced, that will no doubt wear out in time.'

'They are good boys,' said the girl, as one whose thoughts were not in her words; 'but where is the heir—when shall I see him?'

'He is not in England just now,' said Mr. Trefusis, looking at her in some surprise. 'He will not be back much before the wedding, which is fixed for June.'

'And am I to wait here, doing nothing all that time?' cried the girl, starting up, and clasping both hands above her passionate heart, 'must I keep them waiting, watching, longing for me over there, because it has taken me so long to do my duty *here?*'

The Rev. Amos looked at her in amazement, for the first time he realised that she had left home, summer weather, possibly love and respect from her own people, to come to this bleak, inclement parsonage, rocked by March winds, and where her sole heritage was disgrace.

'My dear,' he said, gently, and touched

her hands, 'did you love your home so much, and do you miss your friends so sadly?'

'I want to go back,' she cried, with a passion of pain and longing in her voice; 'no one wants me here, and there are those over there, who are wearying, longing, *dying* for me—and I promised to go back soon; I thought it would take such a little while to do my duty.'

'And what is your duty?' said the Rev. Amos, who found no gleam of light in his bewilderment.

'My father gave me a sacred charge,' she said, grown suddenly calm, 'but that is a secret between him and me. When it is fulfilled I may go home, but not before.'

'God's blessing go with it, my dear, and with you,' said Amos, solemnly; 'you are a good girl, and whatever your trust may be, you'll discharge it. But your father, in putting Guy in possession of the estates, would have done better to make more

satisfactory arrangements, and take the family more into his confidence as regards yourself.'

'He was in his death-throes when he dictated that letter,' said the girl, standing up, and with deep eyes that glowed like sapphires in the pallor of her face, how could he think of everything? Poor father! He did his best;' and here her hand went unconsciously to the slender packet against her breast; 'but it is better as it is—and your daughter will be happy, and take care of you and the boys—and I will call him still my father, but we will speak no more of my mother.'

She had taken his hand and kissed it before he knew of her intention, and before the Rev. Amos had time to rise, she was gone.

CHAPTER V.

Sam's Sweetheart Discriminates.

Some souls have a knack of answering their own questions, even though they have addressed them to others, and Sam's Sweetheart sitting in her bare attic, lit only by those cold northern lights that had dwindled to mere specks since she had left her own country, answered to herself the question to which neither Sharer, nor the Rev. Amos had found a reply. To be the illegitimate daughter of John Trefusis was to be an outcast, something to be ashamed of even by this poor and simple family who had welcomed her so kindly, and whose sole chance of comfort and plenty in the

future might be snatched from them by the spy so unconsciously introduced into their midst.

What if the heir were careless, or a spendthrift, he could at least take Amos out of this patient, miserable life of poverty, he could feed and clothe these great hungry, growing boys, smooth the embittered, careworn look out of Cynthia's nineteen-years face, and John Trefusis would sleep as soundly in his ocean bed as if she had carried his errand out in cruelty, not in love.

The girl had pushed open the window, and the darkness of the sky, with its pin-points of light, seemed nearer to her than this strange, unfamiliar world below, in which she had no place, while over there, thousands of miles away, blind eyes ached with helpless gazing for her return, for the sound of the voice, the touch of the hand, that had not such preciousness nor use to any living soul save him.

Had not the brave, true heart bade her leave him, even to its own undoing? Could a woman's power of self-sacrifice soar higher than this man's had done, so that for his sake she might well count all men as pure and faithful in their loving as herself? A sudden sense of the uselessness of her coming, overwhelmed the girl as her eyes left the stars, and she faced the room, seeing in its dimness vaguely the great white letters of her name standing out alone, and as if written upon air.

'Sam's Sweetheart!' Who was Sam, and had she ever really been sweetheart to any one save the man of whom she was thinking, and to whom she longed to depart? Did she owe any duty to this unknown Sam, of whom Billy and her father had spoken, and with whose name she had been labelled like a parcel of goods, straight through to Devon, so that she had not needed money from the moment that she left Bathurst?

She turned back to the stars, and the white letters receded from her eyes and mind. Sam was dead, but the living claimed her care; yes, she would go home and some day (for with that vague prophetic sense that will show a mother the seeds of death in the blooming body of her child, she knew that her care would not be needed for long) she would do her duty by Sam, perhaps as well out yonder as here.

She would go away now, in the night, and those below would not know that she had assured happiness to them by her seeming ingratitude, and they would treat the poor old father with more honour, and perhaps think kindly of her, now that the disgrace of her presence was lifted from their roof. And her English lover—if some wild despairing thought of meeting him, had influenced her sense of duty to her father (though of this sin, knowing the girl's heart struggles, I am fain to assoïlze

her), then to-night she laid it in its shroud, and turned away from even a last glance at its beauty. She had gold in her pocket, and had been taught its use, though hitherto such knowledge had not been needed, and she thought that by its shine she would make a way across the desolate moors, and so to some place where she would find a ship to carry her back to her own country.

How kind those boys had been, she thought, as she stretched her hand in the gloom to her little hat, and put it on; then finding the door by a slender gleam of light that shone underneath, opened it, only to stumble across some one who sat upon the threshold.

The miserable flicker of the tallow candle fell on her, and revealed her hat to Sharer, as taking her cold hands he said,—

'You are going out, cousin—so late?'

'I am going away,' she said, gently. 'Do not tell the others; and do not think

me ungrateful—it is not for my own sake, but for others.'

The light showed them to each other, the tall, blue-eyed stripling, in whose ruddy face the blood had paled, and the young girl whose eager, lovely eyes looked beyond him, and seemed to see a welcome and love that he could not give her.

'Sweetheart,' he said, and put his strong, young arm round her, 'don't go away, we all love you, you have done us good already, and we'll take more care of the dear old dad, and mend our morals and manners, and be a real credit to you, in time.'

She was only two years older than he, but a century ahead of him in real experience, and this she felt as she said,—

'I can only do you harm by staying, and in my own country I may do good; they want me over there, but I am not wanted here.'

'Has father been saying anything disagreeable?' said Sharer, a frown wrinkling

his young brow; 'it's not like him—and as to Cynthia you mustn't mind her. She's jealous for Tishy, you know, and because we all fell in love with you on the spot—poor Cinders!'

'Cousin,' said the girl, gently, 'don't urge me to stay, some day you would be sorry for it; and though I think I could have loved you, and been as happy here, (she sighed) as anywhere else, there are others who have a greater claim on me, and I must go.'

'Then why did you come?' he said, looking at her with stern, clear eyes that recalled to her, her duty, 'did you travel all those thousands of miles just to have half-an-hour's talk with father, and then steal away without a word of leave-taking to those who may be rude and rough enough, but who would have taken care of, and loved you?'

Duty! It faced her at every turn . . . when she had sent her lover away to fulfil

his, when she had come to a strange country to fulfil hers, expecting to follow his steps, but never overtake him, their barren lives meeting in no word or touch, any more than if one were above ground, the other beneath it.

'I think my duty is to go home,' she said, but her voice trembled, the far-off look faded out of her eyes, and in place of her stern young questioner, she seemed to see her father, with a question upon his lips that she could not answer.

Sharer suddenly snatched up the candlestick, took the girl by the hand, and had marched her into the attic, and shut the door behind them, before she had time to resist.

'Cousin,' he said, leading her to the black box that was the only seat the room afforded, 'sit down here beside me, and let's have a talk. But, first, would you like to cry?' he added, setting the candle on the floor, and putting one arm round

her; 'if so, do; I shan't mind, and the prayer-bell won't ring for another good ten minutes.'

But the girl did not cry; she even smiled at the young, eager face, then kissed him, and so their hearts were knitted together, and ever after they were close comrades, these two, and unconsciously consecrated life-long friends to one another.

'Sweetheart,' said the boy, 'something is troubling you, and I wish you would tell me about it, for perhaps I might help you. But you must not think you are not welcome here, for we all love you, as everybody must who knows you. And if you had stolen away like this, father would never have forgiven himself, and even that good-for-nothing Cinders would have been sorry.'

But Sam's Sweetheart sat quite still, her mind unsettled, but unconvinced by the boy's pleading.

'We are a rough lot, I know,' he went on. 'You see there is no one to take any pains with us, because father has his parish, and Cinders is always so busy. If mother had lived, we might have been different.'

'But after a while, when your sister marries the heir, you will have advantages,' said the girl, gently. 'I should have liked to see him, but it is long to wait—he is a good man?' she said, abruptly, and looking eagerly at the boy.

'The best fellow that ever lived, except as a brother-in-law,' said Sharer, in a grumbling tone; 'but you see we all expected Tishy to marry Bobbie—they've been in love with each other all their lives, and Guy and my sister don't care two buttons for one another. If she's sacrificing herself for us, we're not grateful, as we don't mean to be helped on in the world by sisters' husbands.'

The boy's firm, independent spirit matched

that of his hearer. As she looked at him, her mind made itself up—she would stay.

'I was going away, because I thought you would all be the happier for it and the richer,' she added, 'and there are others that want me, but perhaps my duty lies here.'

Sharer looked at her keenly.

'Cousin,' he said, 'there's something in all this I can't understand. Why did John Trefusis send you here against your will, and what was the duty you were running away from to-night?'

A step sounded without, the door was pushed open, and a figure appeared in the aperture, then retreated.

'I can't tell you,' said the girl, in a whisper, 'but you have done me good—you have kept me true to my promise—and over there,'—now for the first time there were tears in the eyes that sought the stars—'those who love me must—wait.'

'Poor little soul!' said Sharer, even more gently than his father had done, 'we'll try and make it up to you. And now you're dead-beat, and must go to bed,' he added, picking up the candle and stalking with it to the washstand, 'I'll go down now and tell father you're not equal to prayers to-night, and to-morrow morning I'll knock at your door—if you're tired just call out, and Cinders shall bring up your breakfast. You'll promise not to run away in the night?' he added, coming back to where she stood, hat in hand.

'Some other night,' she said, and laughed, then kissed him with all her heart, and got in return a 'Good night, Sweetheart, God bless you!' that made the truest music her ears had yet known in this strange, inclement country.

'Where is Sharer?' said the Rev. Amos, looking up from his open Bible at the young faces surrounding him.

'He is sitting with Sam's Sweetheart in

her attic,' said Cynthia, in a matter-of-fact tone.

'He is doing nothing of the sort, miss,' said Sharer, who now entered; 'but before you begin to read, father,' he added, turning to Amos, 'I want to know if you mean that forlorn little soul upstairs to be put upon, and driven out of this house by insults and gibes about her birth, which she couldn't help any more than the rest of us, though *we* happen to be on the right side of the hedge, and she on the other.'

'Who has been gibing at her, my son?' said his father, blushing guiltily; 'to tell her the truth is, however painful, necessary, —but to gibe——'

'So you have been telling her the truth, father,' said the boy, sadly; 'and she so tired and miserable. Couldn't you have waited till to-morrow? She might have thought what Cinders said was only spite; but she couldn't doubt that what you said was true.'

'These are scarcely matters to be discussed here,' said Amos, looking anxiously at his younger sons who sat with ears agog and open mouths, 'but you will all clearly understand that your new cousin is to be treated with respect; and you, Cynthia,' (he turned on her the sternest look of rebuke she had ever received from him), 'you will respect the laws of decency and hospitality, and make her as welcome as our poor means permit.'

Then he read the evening chapter, and Psalms, prayed aloud, and having kissed each one present, retired.

'There, miss!' said Sharer, when the perturbed parent was out of earshot, 'I've taken you before father, as you've threatened to take *me* many a time, but never for such a sneaking mean action as you did to-night, and now you'll just behave yourself to Miss Sweetheart, for she's under *my* protection, and I mean to take care of her.'

And he marched off with his head up,

and somehow not one of the boys laughed when his back was turned, any more than Cynthia's angry, burning eyes wept. But in his little room, and far on into the night the boy sat with his eyes fixed on the stars, feeling new springs stirred within him, new impulses to which he had hitherto been a stranger. Unconsciously Sam's Sweetheart had roused all that was best in him, come to him at the turning point of his life when he was in danger of becoming coarsened by his careless surroundings and the absence of any womanly influence over him; and the protective instinct that may exalt even a lad to the dignity of manhood, rose up strong and pure in Sharer that night, and he vowed to stand by her in the trouble that he knew to encompass her lot. And Sam's Sweetheart, too, slept soundly that night, knowing that at the end of her long, long journey she had found a friend.

CHAPTER VI.

Miss Sweetheart Mends Socks.

When Sam, some fifteen years previously, so boggled his darns of the 'little un's' socks, that he was compelled to take lessons in the art of mending, he probably did not foresee the circumstances under which his sweetheart would, with even less success, essay her first labour of love on a cousin's stocking.

For when, on the morning after her arrival, the boys had departed to school (it was Sharer's last quarter he told her, and the others begged her to cheer up, for the Easter holidays were close at hand, and then they would show her the neigh-

bourhood), and Mr. Trefusis had gone on his parish rounds, so heartened up, and looking so brisk and well, that his poor people hoped somebody had left him a fortune, but by honest inquiry found out only that his family had been unexpectedly increased by the arrival of a young cousin from abroad (no matter of rejoicing, surely, to have another mouth to feed), and when Cynthia had got through the drudgery of her usual morning duties, and sat down alone to the inevitable basket-ful of stockings, then it was that an unexpected step sounded, and the young stranger's voice startled Cynthia with a request to be taught stocking-mending. Cynthia stared, then selecting one of the best of the tattered heap before her, gave it with needle and worsted into the girl's hand.

'That is one of Sharer's,' she said, perhaps without intentional irony; 'you had better begin at the toes—the heels want careful darning, or his feet will be blistered.'

'Have they no better ones than these?' said the girl, as she thrust her slender fist through the stocking-foot, then patiently tried to draw the edges together over it.

'No,' said Cynthia; 'we are very poor,' she added, more haughtily than if she had said, 'we are very great;' 'but to be poor is no disgrace ——;' and here she broke off abruptly, and turned scarlet with pain and self-rebuke.

'You will all be rich some day,' said the stranger, without any change of colour. 'I wish the heir would come back,' she added, laying down her sock, and looking eagerly at Cinders' pale face, and poor red eyelids; 'I want to see them both—he and your sister—and together!'

'Why are you so curious about him?' said Cynthia, thinking that this girl was a fool to show her heart so plainly. At this rate five minutes of stocking-mending would reveal every secret the aborigine might have in the world.

'He is my father's heir,' said the girl, simply; 'I want him to manage his inheritance well, and make other people happy.'

'And do you think you can teach him how to do it?' said Cynthia, drily.

'I wish you had a portrait of him,' said Sam's Sweetheart; 'I could tell so much better . . . . or even if you had one of Tishy.'

'Her name is Lætitia,' said Cynthia.

'And she loves some one who is called Bobbie,' went on the girl, 'and who loves her—why does she not marry him instead of Guy?'

'You seem to know a great deal about our sister's affairs,' said Cynthia, coldly, 'some one or other in the house seems to have been talking great rubbish.'

'It was your father,' said the girl, simply, 'and afterwards Sharer told me, and it seems to me a pity. He will not trouble to do his work well with a woman who

does not love him. And you have no picture of her at all?'

'No,' replied Cynthia, growing colder and colder, though her sympathies were all on Bobbie's side, with each word the stranger spoke; 'we never could afford but one, and Guy took that away to be coloured, and fixed in a locket.'

For the first time the colour flickered in the stranger's cheek, the memory of the locket that had sundered her from the Englishman, swept across her as she said,—

'Do all Englishmen carry about with them the portraits of their sweethearts?'

For a moment the two girls looked at each other, trembling on the brink of a discovery, for if Cynthia had said, 'Why are you so curious as to Englishmen and their ways? Guy has just returned from Australia—did you meet him there?' or if the aborigine had said, 'I never saw but one locket in my life, but the face inside

was like yours and Sharer's, only far more beautiful'—if either, I say, had spoken, then the rest of this story need not have been written, for the catastrophe averted by Sharer last night would have occurred to-day, and Sam's Sweetheart have for ever disappeared from the Trefusis family like a shadow that appears but to instantly vanish.

But even as one of them opened her lips to speak, a voice in the doorway said,—

'If you please, Miss Cinther, the butcher didn't kill yesterday, the gentry won't take the whole of a bullock atween them; and he says there'd be the kidneys and some of the baste's best parts throwed upon his hands—so, what's we going to do for master's dinner, and him had no more nor poached eggs and bacon three days running?'

'And is that all the boys have had, too?' said Sam's Sweetheart, in a voice of such horror, that Sal, the maid-of-all-work,

looked at the girl with mingled respect and admiration, for how, pray, should a heathen savage be expected to know about Christian eggs, and cured pork?

'They might have less,' said Cynthia, coldly, and went away, leaving the girl to shed a salt tear over a boggled toe, dashing both away as in the distance she saw the Rev. Amos approaching, returned a good hour before his usual time, and with the look of a man who expected to be met by something pleasant.

And he got it, when Sam's Sweetheart flew down the path, and with her arm (the stocking still on it) through his, begged him to let her walk a little way with him if he were not tired.

'How tall you are, my dear,' he said, looking at her with a sort of wonder at her beauty: 'taller than Tishy, but slighter, and I think you carry yourself more erectly.'

'It is all we savages have, our carriage,'

said the girl, a little sadly, then tied Sharer's stocking round her head, and turned the vicar's steps back to the moor.

Poor Cinders, standing at the kitchen window in hopeless confab with the cook, saw the pair disappear, and thought bitterly of how it is only the useless women beautify a man's life, and are beloved by him, while the drones who keep him alive, and toil for him, get no thanks, and are accepted as one of the mere accidents of existence.

When the Rev. Amos and the girl came home an hour later to their eggs and bacon, he sat down to them as to a feast; this new atmosphere of love and consideration came like a warm breath to the elderly man whose heart and blood were more than a little chilled with his experience of life and human nature.

Though he never pined for bodily indulgence, he was no anchorite, and knew

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how to enjoy them; and that very morning his unwonted cup of hot coffee, the porridge free of burn, the delicately toasted rasher of bacon served last of all, each and all of these good things being the result of a son's early rising, assisted by cook, had nourished him mentally and bodily, so that he sat down with perfect satisfaction to his eggs and bacon, dispensing far larger portions to the girls than to himself.

That stocking on the girl's arm had showed to him like a flag of truce between her and Cynthia, and he talked to the two as one, and presently inquired what the boys had got in their basket for lunch.

'Bread and cheese,' said Cynthia, whom pain was rendering cruel.

'Dear me,' said Amos, [illegible]ing back his scarcely tasted dinne[illegible] growing so fast too, — what wou[illegible]r mother say?'

It struck the stranger pitifully, how in that motherless house, where its mistress was unconsciously missed at every turn, no one realised what her loss was, save the man whose soul was supposed to dwell entirely in his spiritual, not his every-day life.

'The boys are young and strong,' she said, drawing his plate towards him; 'if they want flesh, they should earn it'—and her eyes flashed, and her cheek kindled, as her hand went involuntarily to her side, for those simple weapons with whose spoil she had fed the Englishman so faithfully and well. But when she had persuaded him to finish his meal, and had also wrapped him up in his shabby coat against the March winds, even accompanying him as far across the moor as he deemed safe for a stranger to those parts, she went slowly back, and sitting down by the gate, longed for the five boys' return from school, or anything to break

the first real hour of stagnation that for months her life had known.

She put up her hand to shield her eyes as she gazed at the scene before her, and for the first time realised why it was that the dwellers in this land loved it so well, even as the Arab clings to his wastes of sun-smitten sand; as the Highlander worships the bleak mountains to whose summits he daily climbs. Her wild, free spirit seemed to pass out of her, to wander across the moors, boundless as the ocean, with only the distant outlines of the hills, now purple, blue-green, or grey, to break the horizon, and the distant gleam of that silvern river, whom its people reproach sadly enough with the refrain,—

> River o' Dart! River o' Dart!
> Every year thou losest a heart.

While the shadows of the great clouds above that flitted across the moors in their superb march, made the outlook one that even in

her own country she had not matched for vastness and grandeur.

At her feet grew the heather, far behind her the great Tors lifted their granite heads, the scent of the furze came blown on the crest of the wild west wind; but most of all she joyed to see the shadows of the clouds run their Titanic races on such an arena as ocean or limitless forest could never have afforded.

For awhile the girl gazed, then turned her thoughts inward, and covered her eyes with her hands.

Passion and duty—duty and passion—like hot and cold blasts, the two had rocked her during the past six months, and now she had come to a dead calm, in which patience alone was demanded of her, and the quiet fulfilment of natural deeds of kindness towards the family who had, with one exception, received her so generously.

She had been more closely drawn to Amos than to the younger ones, for his life

just then seemed in harmony with hers, only his was one of passive suffering and self-abnegation, hers one of passionate pain, all the more intense because she would not cry out under its torture.

And after Amos, already she loved Sharer for his eager championship of her, and the strong, beautiful youth from which the hope and freshness had not faded as they had done from hers, though there was so little real difference of age between them.

But he was stronger than she, he had prevented her running away like a coward the night before; and if she had gone, the heir would have married the heartless young beauty who loved somebody else, and what chance would there be then, of the proper administration of John Trefusis' estate? But the waiting for the young heir's return would be hard, and even then she might be able to do no good; and meanwhile—meanwhile . . . she started up, almost frightened to find that she was cry-

ing, tears had always come slowly and painfully to her till now, and she dashed them away, then flew off to put into effect an idea that had occurred to her earlier in the day, but since slipped out of her mind.

Half-an-hour later she was kneeling before the Rev. Amos's study grate, a pile of sticks, and thick pieces of wood that she had gathered, and brought home in her arms, lying in a heap beside her. When she had laid the fire in, and placed a good sized log on its top, she looked around for the matches that she had learned the use of last night, and striking one, soon had a fire that roared half up the chimney, and yet was solid enough to last some time. Then she sallied forth again, and found more wood, though this quest lasted longer, and included some local observations, and searching inquiry into the animal life of the immediate neighbourhood.

But she was back in time to rush out and welcome the boys on their return, an

immense smut on her nose, her cheeks and chin no better, and hands blacker than the coal that she had not dared to demand of Cynthia.

'Oh, I'm so glad to see you!' she said, hugging them all round just as naturally as she had kept her lovers at arm's length; 'and I've made the dear old dad such a fire —come and see.'

They followed her eagerly; they had walked and talked themselves into a state of enthusiasm about the girl as they tore home from school, and being disgusted with Tishy's fine ladyism and Cynthia's crossness, took her to their hearts more warmly perhaps than if they had not just then been so angry with their womenkind.

'Boys,' she said, when they had admired her handiwork, and returned to the open hall-door, 'how much money does it cost to buy a greatcoat?'

Four of the boys whistled, but Sharer

blushed and turned abruptly away. Was he not the worst dressed of the lot? But if she were thinking of him, then the strongest link between him and Sam's Sweetheart would be broken.

'Three pounds at the very least,' said Tom, after the scarcely perceptible pause; 'and you'd have to walk five miles to get it. But it's too late for greatcoats—why, next month will be spring!'

'Next month is not this month,' said the girl, wistfully; 'and he is so cold; can't you see how he shivers when the winds cut through him? If it were only for a week, he ought to be made warm and comfortable; and he shall be!' she added, turning her exquisite face obscured by smuts on the tall cousin who stood apart, his back turned upon her.

At her voice he turned, defiance and shame in his eyes that died, as slipping her hand through his arm, she said,—

'You'll help me, Sharer, won't you?

And to-morrow we'll get up very early and go and buy something warm for the dear old dad?'

The boy's head went up; he felt as much like a king in his poverty, as she looked a princess in spite of the splashes and freaks of black on her face; then he said, gripping her little black hand,—

'We'll get up to-morrow at six, the shops will be open by seven, and be back here before school time, though too late for breakfast.'

'We will kill something coming home!' she said, and flew off to wash her face and hands; then returning with her hat on, said they might take her for a walk.

In the lengthening evening, her clear eyes noted many things, and the boys were a little puzzled to answer her questions about the animals, tame and wild, that occasionally crossed their path.

She saw cows, and sheep, and under-

stood that they belonged to different persons whose rights (as representative of tribes) she respected; but the rabbit that scudded, the hare that leaped, the brown bird that flew above their heads, were not these all wild game, and the property of any hand that had cunning, and could slay them?

'Boys,' she said, as they walked soberly homewards, 'you've only had bread and cheese to-day, and there's no meat in the house; but to-morrow you shall have something good, so mind you come back early.'

'To-morrow is Saturday, and a half-holiday,' said Tom, dubiously; 'and killing day too, cousin, but we shan't get much before our topside of beef after morning church on Sunday.'

'Come back early to-morrow,' said Sam's Sweetheart, encouragingly, as in the midst of her body-guard she entered the house in which no ray of fire or candle (save the one

she had herself kindled) shone, 'and you shall have something better to eat than bread and cheese — as your father shall have something better than eggs and bacon!'

CHAPTER VII.

Miss Sweetheart goes Hunting.

Sharer and Miss Sweetheart were both missing from prayers and breakfast next morning, and since Cinders showed real ignorance, and the boys feigned it, of the missing pair's doings, the Rev. Amos ate his well-prepared meal in some perplexity, and with less appetite than the one of yesterday. But with the stroke of half-past eight, and just as he was rising, the two delinquents ran in with guiltless faces, and having first kissed him for pleasure, and apologised for duty's sake, flew to the trencher, and ate dry bread heartily, and without much respect for appearances.

Amos suspected unlawful doings, but forbore to shake his head as he retired. Already the delight and the joy that he found in the young stranger's presence pointed to some swift retribution in suffering to himself, that would reduce him to his usual comfortless state of mind, more lonely, miserable than ever after his brief interval of sunshine. But when the boys had departed for school, and he came out to get his hat and coat, he found a hat, but no coat, for this new, warm thing that hung on the peg was certainly not his.

As he turned away, a girl stole out from behind a door whence she had been peeping.

'Cousin,' she said, running after him with the coat in her arms, 'we got it for you this morning—Sharer and I—for we feel the cold so bitterly when it blows through you!'

Cynthia heard, and smiled scornfully at the girl for a humbug, but Amos, who had

much humility, and no pride, took the coat, and said, 'God bless you, my child,' as she helped him on with it.

'Come home in good time for dinner,' she said, wistfully, as she went with him to the gate; 'the boys will be here, you know, and cook and I are going to try and make you a feast!'

'It is we who should be seeing about a feast for you, my dear,' he said, with tears in his eyes. 'But I said a word to Cynthia this morning—and we all love you, my dear'—and then he went away, not wishing her to see the weakness to which her loving deed had reduced him.

When he had quite disappeared, the girl ran up to her attic, and with beating heart opened her box, out of which she drew certain simple weapons that she concealed behind her back as she ran downstairs. She had already learned the situation of the kitchen, and looked in as she passed. It was empty, the cook being engaged

with Cynthia upstairs over the household work, ending in that weekly struggle over the 'wash' which made the one wish she were a maid-of-all-work, and the servant bless her stars that she was not born a lady.

Sal had her rest of nights, her half Sundays out, and her sweetheart's kisses, regular (at odd moments) behind the haystack, and with all her honest soul she pitied and despised the makeshifts of those who, being born gentle folks, had to live more poorly than day-labourers.

She and the young stranger were kindred spirits (as she presently found out), but at present her whole energies were confined to matching socks, sewing buttons on night and day shirts, and generally restoring an air of decency to the wreck of the Trefusis' laundry.

'There'll be extra washing next week, I s'pose,' said the woman, as she filled her arms with linen for airing. 'I allus

thought them sort of persons never wore nothink; but p'raps they find it a bit cold this side of the world.'

Cynthia vouchsafed no reply; her mind was full of the anxieties of dinner, as she slowly followed Sal.

Her father had said to her that morning before prayers, 'My dear, we must stretch a point in hospitality to our guest, for of course we cannot take wages for her food and lodging; and as to that bank bill, why, we will keep it for her; no doubt the lawyer people up in London will understand it. But if you could manage something for her that she could fancy, without running us into debt, I should be pleased.'

Cynthia thought, sourly, that the money spent on her father's great-coat had been better laid out on those comforts that the aborigine seemed to expect, and with no intention of forestalling the Sunday's dinner, descended listlessly enough to the kitchen.

But a shriek of mingled amazement and joy ahead, hastened her steps to discover Sal in the act of uplifting arms and voice over the assortment of animals neatly laid out on the kitchen table.

A hare, two rabbits, a pheasant, three partridges, and a fine fat turkey reposed side by side, and rejoiced the hearts of the pair that gazed.

'Drat that boy from the Castle,' said Sal. 'He allus cuts and runs after bringing a present of game, or sich, from His Grass, just as if we hadn't a glass o' beer, or a sixpence to give him for his trouble!'

Cynthia's dull eyes brightened as at a problem unexpectedly solved, and she turned eagerly to Sal, saying,—

'There is time to cook the hare and the rabbits for the boys' dinner, and to-night we will have a little supper for father off the pheasant, and to-morrow we will have the turkey, so that the joint will keep till Monday.'

But beneath this threatened accumulation of cookery, Sal looked so black that Cynthia trembled, and it was with a sense of relief that she heard a gentle voice say,—

'May I help?' and looked round to see Sam's Sweetheart timidly advancing.

'Can you cook?' she said, with the first impulse of sympathy she had yet known towards her new relation.

'Not in your English way, though our own is good,' she said; 'but I can prepare them ——,' and on receiving a yet warm body, proceeded to skin it in a way that earned Sal's praise.

'Her's got hands besides looks,' she said in a cautious whisper; 'she'd pluck the pheasant like nothing with them clever fingers, and truss the turkey for hanging till Tuesday. For you'll have the roast beef to-morrow,' she added, thinking of the haystack and her lover.

Cynthia sighed—no such ending came to

her Sunday's dinner as glorified Sal's; then she said,—

'Yes, we will have the roast beef——,' and went away, leaving the two cooks to become fast friends over the preparation of a dinner that two hours later was eaten with the devoutest thankfulness by at least five out of the six hungry males for whom it had been so lovingly and unlawfully made ready.

CHAPTER VIII.

Miss Sweetheart goes to Church.

The Rev. Amos had somewhat dreaded Sunday, not knowing of what religion his young guest might be, for he no more thought of meddling with the rights of her soul, than of exacting an account of the contents of her purse, so that when he said at breakfast next morning, 'You will go to church with us, my dear, or perhaps you would rather stay at home?' all the boys looked at her eagerly, half afraid that she would disappoint them by her reply.

'I shall go with you,' she said; then noticing for the first time the unusual smartness of the boys' get-up, remembered

to put on her gloves when she fetched her hat, and ran down radiant to join the party already assembled in the hall.

'No bonnet—and her every-day dress,' thought Cynthia, who wore a faded silk, and a tulle abomination tied on her head with crumpled strings.

'No jacket, my dear?' said Amos, looking down with shame at his own warm coat, 'and there is an east wind too.'

'I have one,' she said, as she put her hand through his arm; 'but I couldn't breathe in it—even in this dress I am too warm.'

'What used you to wear in Australia?' said Tom, who, being on her other side, and Sharer being out of earshot, found this opportunity irresistible.

'Leaves.'

Cynthia heard and laughed, and somehow the laugh brought the colour to Amos's cheek, and made him hurry his steps a little, so that he and the girl got the start

of the rest, yet none thought of trying to overtake the pair.

The peace of the Sabbath day, to her keen senses unlike the work-a-day ones, stole into the girl's soul as they went silently on through the clear, beautiful morning till they reached the porch of a dwelling that seemed to her fairer than any she had hitherto seen in England.

'This is God's house,' he said, and removed his hat, and went in.

The girl followed him slowly, her pulses thrilled, her heart touched with a curious awe that she had never known in those temples not made with hands, with which she was familiar.

She followed Amos without much thought of the men and women through whom she passed, but when he had set her at one end of the long, narrow bench that faced the people, and was to the left of the pulpit, she looked down at them with eager, lovely eyes that searched each face,

in a way that to the oldest inhabitant was unfamiliar.

To be sure, Parson had picked up wonderful during the last few days, seemed warmer—body and soul, and had actually got a great-coat that, however late in the day, might be a power of comfort to him yet. And in some vague way the gazers identified his happiness and comfort with the new mouth yonder that 'Parson' had got to feed, and the handsomest too that had ever spoken, or been silent in that church. Why, Parson's handsome daughter was nothing to this tall, exquisite girl, who looked like a princess, and dressed as plainly as one of themselves!

When the boys came in, and Cynthia sat down at the other end, the stranger's advantage over them was more fully shown, and the women gasped, and the yokels stared, dimly wondering who could be the wonderful creature that eclipsed even Miss Tishy.

The Rev. Amos came out in his white robes, and the girl held her breath as she looked at him—not so had the ship's chaplain looked when he read the church service on deck; and as the old and young people rose in the distant aisles, a dim sense of the peace, love, and beauty that may come from the ritual of a creed in harmony with Christ, stole into the girl's heart, and she listened to Amos's voice as though it had been the voice of God.

These weather-beaten faces upon which gradually peace stole; these young fresh faces that gradually sobered, and grew like angels as they heard the voice, and looked at the face of the man who addressed them . . . . and last of all, her eyes rested on a shabby man who, in his working clothes, had entered and sat down just within the porch, the toil-worn look dying gradually out of his face, until by merely watching him, the girl felt that she understood. But when the organ spoke, and the people's

voices rose, she closed her eyes in sudden pain; hitherto she had heard but the blending of human or bird voices, not the discordant mingling of them, and she was glad when the psalm ceased, and Amos's clear, beautiful voice was heard alone.

She never once looked at the book Sharer had put into her hand, but alternately at the reader and the people, so that spirit and words alike crept into her soul, and remained there.

Perhaps in the rugged features of the men and women before her, the girl got some idea of the patience, the daily self-sacrifice of those silent, never-heard-of lives, who must yet surely leave the world the better for their mere existence, strengthening the hands of the future out of the struggle and toil of the present.

To the Ten Commandments she listened attentively, but clutched Sharer's arm involuntarily when Amos's voice rang out—

'"Thou shalt not steal."'

But she said nothing when Sharer asked what had frightened her, and when presently her cousin stood in his black robe in the pulpit, she turned towards him, and never for one second, till he had done, looked away.

The poor folks said after, that they had never heard Parson preach so straight and well as on that morning, just as he had never looked so bright and heartsome, warm inside and out, as he looked that day.

Perhaps the sight of that young, eager face down below inspired him; but that morning Amos spoke from his soul, and, wherever a body present had one, found it.

The day passed in a peace that even to the boys was not dulness; but, when they bade her good-night, they told her that, though she would not see much of them next day, they were coming home on Wednesday for a whole fortnight.

This thought sent them all upstairs on air, and next morning brought some comfort to the young stranger's mind as she resumed stocking-mending with Cynthia, having surreptitiously read the Ten Commandments as framed in Amos' study.

It was curious that Cynthia, who had expressed such a fellow-feeling for the vagabondage of John Trefusis, and the freedom of the Australian life, found no questions concerning it to ask of his daughter. Possibly she thought such inquiry trenched on the rigid if poor hospitality on which Sharer and her father insisted, but it made conversation between the two girls so bald and desultory that often it died absolutely for half-an-hour at a time.

But once when Cynthia was explaining that her youngest brother had been nicknamed 'Miss Miggs,' because of an absurd resemblance supposed by the other boys to exist between him and Sim Tapper-

titt's female adorer, Miss Trefusis added, as though the idea had only just occurred to her,

'By-the-by, had you any name over there besides Sam's Sweetheart?'

'Yes,' said the girl, looking steadily at her cousin; 'but only my own people, and those who loved me, called me by it, and no doubt they will remember it against my return.'

'You mean to go back?' said Cynthia, the words springing honestly from her lips, and never had the stranger liked her so well as that moment.

'Yes,' she said, simply; 'when I have seen the heir. But I wish to see your sister, too. Will she not be coming home soon to prepare for her marriage?'

'She will not be married here,' said Cynthia, a fierce blush upon her cheek as she glanced round the room; 'she is with our father's sister in London, and will hardly trouble to come to us until

after the wedding.' She had meant to say, 'She cannot come because the season is beginning, and all her triumphs are before her.' But what would a savage understand of such a speech?

'Then I shall go and see her,' said Sam's Sweetheart.

Cynthia gasped. Already she had some vague idea of Mrs. Transome's establishment, and would no more have thought of knocking at her doors for admission, than of calling upon her cook.

'You would not be admitted,' she said; then remembered how she had used some such words to Bobbie, and could have cried to think of how true they had proved.

'Tell her to come here,' said the stranger, with that pride of glance and air of blue blood that had so often staggered Cynthia; 'it might save time and trouble,' she added, with her hand pressed against her bosom.

Then seeing Amos approach, she ran out, but that very morning Cynthia sat down and wrote a letter.

Now this Monday turned out a day of disappointments, since the turkey, ready trussed for dinner and hung in the larder, was found to have disappeared when Sal went to fetch it, being discovered, three days later, in the midst of a moor to which invisible hands had conveyed it.

Then a letter arrived from the Castle, in which His Grace politely waived Amos' thanks for the game, since he had sent none, and, moreover, it was out of season, hare, partridge, and pheasant shooting being over.

Whereupon Sal remembered how the creatures' bodies had seemed to palpitate even while she dressed them, and called on Sam's Sweetheart to corroborate her.

This the girl did, and finally the mysterious matter was set down as some

poacher's trick, who, finding himself pressed hard, or feeling qualms of conscience, had stolen in with his booty, and left it silently for 'Parson.'

And that very day came the news that Bobbie Sands had been left a fortune—not one so vast that a man might addle his brains (like the heir of John Trefusis) in trying to reckon it up, but a comfortable, safe thing that Miss Tishy need not 'have sneezed at,' said the farmers, as one told another of the news that evening.

Not a true man in the neighbourhood but knew Squire Sands' son and Parson's handsome daughter were 'courting,' and not one of them had looked but blank when it became known that she was to marry her cousin, and become Countess of Thor.

The boys brought the news in with a rush upon the two girls, as together they busied themselves in the house, and one

thought that perhaps the heir was saved, and the other wished she could have added a postscript to the letter despatched barely an hour ago.

'Dear old Bob!' cried Sharer, and almost forgetting his quarrel with Cynthia, in the excitement of the moment; 'but what's the good of it without Tishy?'

'His uncle had left it all to another nephew,' cried Tom, cutting in; 'a mealy-mouthed creature, who pretended to go to the Spring Meetings, but was found out going—'

A punch in the ribs from Sharer checked Tom's oratory, and made him look shamefacedly at his new cousin, who was not heeding him.

'Well, the upshot of it is,' he concluded, as cheerfully as circumstances permitted, 'Bobbie is heir to everything—house, lands, invested money—to the tune of about four thousand a-year!'

'Tishy will be sorry when she hears it,' remarked Miss Miggs, from a distance. 'What's the good of being richer than your wants? And Bobbie could have given her as much of everything as she could have comfortably managed.'

'He won't look at her now,' said Podge, and Cynthia's own sinking heart confirmed the boy's words; 'Bobbie's not the man to be thrown over twice, and plenty of girls 'll be glad enough to be made Mrs. Sands.'

'He's coming to see his father next week,' said Miss Miggs; 'what a lark if he falls in love with Miss Sweetheart!'

'Horses wouldn't drag him over here to see us,' said Ned, loftily; 'and if Miss Tishy wants him, she'll have to go and fetch him.'

Sam's Sweetheart had disappeared, so the roughness of the boys was in the ascendant, but they all felt ashamed of

themselves as Cynthia suddenly burst into tears, and ran out of the room.

But was she crying for Tishy or for Guy—for Bobbie or herself? Perhaps she did not know.

CHAPTER IX.

Sam's Sweetheart Disgraces the Family.

The boys duly ended their school labours on Wednesday, a good week before Easter, and early on Thursday morning began to enjoy their holiday in real earnest.

Now, whether the stocking-mending business had depressed the stranger's spirits, so that in the rebound they flew to wildness, or that in the boys' vigorous, bright company, she found the stimulus that for the last few days her life had lacked, one thing is certain (and I grieve to relate it) that Sam's Sweetheart threw off all restraints, forgot the Ten Commandments, and ram-

paged abroad with the boys from morning until night.

At breakfast she would appear dutiful and loving as ever to Amos, his fire would be neatly laid in, waiting only Sal's match faithfully set to it before his return from his rounds, but after breakfast boys and girl alike disappeared, and were seen no more until evening, when they would come home to tea not in the least hungry, and often the bread and cheese they had taken for lunch brought back untouched in their satchels.

They never had much account to give of themselves; they had been running about, and climbing trees, they said; and indeed the green smudges that adorned the girl's serge frock pointed to certain exercises at which Cynthia sneered, yet expected no better from a savage.

But Amos saw nothing wrong. The girl was always there in the evenings to bring his tea, make his toast, and, with the boys,

surround him with that atmosphere of respect and consideration to which his heart expanded as under a warm day in spring.

And the boys were all the better and brighter (thought their father) for her presence; and often, as he looked at the tall, handsome lads, his heart yearned to her, thinking that more of the mother's instinct beat in her young breast, than Cynthia or Tishy's had ever harboured.

She joined in their prayers, too, and, taught by the boys abroad, learned the tune of the next Sunday's hymn, so that in the morning a voice, pure and clear as a boy or bird's, outsang all the others, till first one ceased, then another, and the deaf old men and women nodded and closed their eyes, hearing once more the linnet's song. . . .

Cynthia had got no reply to her letter, but she wrote no other.

One afternoon her father came home

early, and, to her surprise, came to the schoolroom and sat down beside her. 'My dear,' he said, 'I have been thinking that it must be lonely for you here, and you remain too much within doors; why do you not join the boys and your cousin in their rambles?'

He looked at her wistfully, thinking that he had neglected her, and wondering if it were his fault that he seemed to understand her so little; but just then the girl's heart was stubborn, and she did not look up from her work.

'Some are born to play and some to work, father,' she said; 'one of these days, perhaps, it will be my turn to play.'

Amos sighed and went away. Then he thought of Bobbie, and how Tishy was bartering the substance of happiness for its shadow, and the freshly-kindled study fire brought no warmth to his body. Then he thought of the boys, and of how the girl had sung in church yesterday, and he

smiled, like a man who is comforted, and turned to his sermon. But if the poor man could have taken the roof off his own wash-house, or even looked in through the open door, he would have seen a sight to unsettle his stomach, and harrow his soul for more than a live-long day.

A bird baked in clay was gracefully yielding up his spirit-manifestations after death, in delicious odours that assailed the six eager, youthful noses (five male and one female) that bent over him, and belonged to bodies that had not tasted anything since breakfast, though they had run and raced a good ten miles since then.

The moment of fruition had arrived, the girl broke the clay, divided with Sharer's clasp-knife the spoil, then, with her own slender portion in her hand, sat down on the hearth, crossed-legged, to enjoy it.

Her simple weapons lay beside her, the holidays were not nearly over, yet she held

the toothsome bone in her hand, and sighed as one who, in the full tide of battle, stands stock-still to think.

The past few days had gone like a flash of light, in which she had breathed, stretched her cramped limbs, felt the use once more of ear, hand, and eye, the whole real and invisible armoury of the savage who lives by his wits, and exults in them.

Her youth leaped out, her habits mastered her in the past days when for the first time she found comrades equal to her own daring, and in the interval between her season of passionate despair, and the resumption of her harder duty, what wonder if she had snatched at freedom, and for a brief space merged heart, soul, and thought in it? A week ago Amos had been nearest to her, now the boys were nearer; as she climbed, leaped, snared, and poached beside them, she felt the first real breath of liberty that she had known since she left her people.

She dared not look back, she feared to look forward, here was her interval of enjoyment, presently would come stocking-mending, and the duties of a spy.

The clear northern air, the bright sky, roused and brisked her young blood (hardly yet restored from a wasting fever, of which she never spoke), she seemed to move and throb with the season that was now putting on some airs of morning dress, while her keen senses tasted each scent of leaf and bud, sound and sight, in a way that defied even Sharer to keep up with her.

Perhaps the boy did not love his idol the less, but the better, for the flaw he found in her, it brought her nearer to him; and who could expect a young Australian to understand the laws of *meum et tuum* when she had never been taught anything of the sort?

Her splendid skill in handling her weapons, her lovely shape as it fled before the wind, and fleeter than the game she pur-

sued, her perfect knowledge of savage cookery, that in its results far surpassed civilised efforts; all these graces and accomplishments made him admire her but the more, and follow her banner wheresoever she chose to flaunt it.

He thought she must be out of spirits that afternoon, since she would not eat, nor yet tell them any of those stories that they so dearly loved; and presently she gave her portion to Podge, who took it thankfully, and wished it had been more.

'Would it do your father harm if we were found out?' she said later on to Sharer as they neared the house.

'They can't catch us,' said Sharer, confidently; 'we came ten miles as the crow flies this afternoon, and they don't know our faces from Adam, or where we came from.'

'I knocked that first man over without thinking,' said the girl, 'it seemed so natural, you know; but I tripped that other

one up on purpose, and he fell so heavily, I think I must have hurt him!'

'Why couldn't he keep out of the way?' said Sharer, loftily; 'he only got what he deserved; and if he ventures over here, he shall get such a trouncing as shall make him glad to go back again.'

Cynthia burned with curiosity as to their doings, but asked no questions, only kept her ears open to their talk between tea and supper.

'There must have been a Johnnie Faa in our family at some remote period,' she heard Sharer say, as he mended his bird-snaring nets, 'for we are all born wanderers. I don't believe one of us (unless it's father) will ever settle down quietly and die under our own roof-tree.'

'And we were fifteen well-made men,
Although we were na bonnie,
And we were all put down but ane,
For à fair young wanton lady!'

quoted Miss Miggs, from the old ballad;

'I hope none of us will get put down—that is to say, nabbed—for to-day's work—eh, Ned?'

'Hush!' said Ned, looking towards Cynthia; 'but Guy'll have to settle down,' he added, louder, 'or he'll hear of it from Tishy.'

'Is he a wanderer, too?' said Sam's Sweetheart, looking up.

'Why,' said Ned, opening his eyes in wonder,—'why, don't you know he's only come back lately from Australia, and started off again on his travels within ten days?'

'More fool Bobbie not to cut in while his back is turned,' said Podge, in a grumbling voice. 'I never thought Tishy would show so little spirit as to marry a man who doesn't want her.'

'To what part of Australia did Guy Trefusis go?' said Sam's Sweetheart, eagerly.

None of the boys knew, all were hazy as

to their geography; and Cynthia, who could have answered if she had chosen, feigned deafness to Sharer's inquiry, but listened keenly for the girl's next words.

'Do all rich Englishmen go to Australia?' said the girl.

'Did you ever meet one there?' said Cynthia, swiftly, her voice a little raised.

'Yes,' said the girl, simply; 'I brought him through the bush.'

The boys (all but Sharer) looked at each other, then at her. Was an English sweetheart the true explanation of her appearance among them?

The fire leaped up, and showed her cheek paler than usual as Cynthia said,—

'No doubt he was grateful. What was his name?'

'I never asked him,' said the girl, proudly; 'in our country we do not ask our guests' names.'

'So you brought him through the bush,' said Ned, with a gasp of admiration, 'and

you fed him, and protected him, and everything?'

'Yes.'

There was a curious ring in her voice that Cynthia noted, and to which she sought a clue afterwards.

'And did he fall in love with you?' said Miss Miggs, looking at the girl narrowly.

'He was going home to be married,' she said, without a quiver of her features. 'He must have got his wife long before now, and I hope he is happy.'

'It's a wonder to me no black fellow ever snapped you up,' said Tom, shaking his head; 'but they are all ugly, aren't they—undersized, with retreating jaws, and all that sort of thing?'

'The handsomest man I ever saw in my life was what you call a black man,' she said, proudly, 'but he is really a Maori, and my cousin.'

'So that's why you didn't fall in love with the Englishman?' said Ned, who, being

the youngest, exposed his thoughts oftener than the others; 'for, of course, he fell in love with you. Do you mean to marry the other one when you go back?'

The girl did not reply; she was looking down at the slender, unringed hand that lay in her lap, but Sharer saw the quiver of her lips, and having with an energetic nod and whisper scattered his brothers, came back, and sat down beside her. The boys keenly resented the monopoly of her —to them she was a romance, a walking three-volume novel, the world and its knowledge, everything that a young girl of eighteen is hardly expected to be.

They could never go back to their lessons after this week of freedom and adventure, but there was another one ahead, and no suspicion of the Nemesis in pursuit of them, haunted either of the boys' slumbers as they lay down to rest that night.

CHAPTER X.

Miss Tishy Comes Home.

On Wednesday morning at breakfast Cynthia announced with a triumphant smile that Tishy was coming home for Easter, and would arrive next day.

Amos looked at once pleased and sorry, for while he loved his daughter dearly, he disapproved of her worldliness; the boys whistled softly, and looked first at one another, then at the new cousin, whose face flashed a joy that she did not try to conceal.

Cynthia looked at her coldly, thinking that now the savage would be put in her proper place, but her own heart throbbed

at the thought of Tishy's return, and all that day she sang at her household work, and over her simple preparation for the beauty's return.

The boys said little, but suspected Miss Tishy was up to some mischief, — after Bobbie, very likely, having heard of his good luck, and being tired of hollow society and Guy's open neglect.

But on reflection they scorned to believe her 'so mean a May,' and came to the conclusion that her complexion wanted rejuvenating, or that she wished to dazzle them with her grandeur; but not one of them gave her credit for the real touch of affection for her family that had determined Tishy's visit.

To be sure her complexion wanted a little nursing, but she could have gone to any one out of a dozen country-houses; and as to Bobbie, she had no more expectation of seeing him than of one risen from the dead. She was a little curious, however,

to see the savage; and when on Thursday afternoon she saw the six familiar figures that waited for her on the platform, she felt a momentary disappointment that the stranger was not there.

Perhaps no one is so bad or so heartless as we think him. We talk ourselves into anger with the absent, and then are ashamed of it when we see them face to face; and the boys could have bit their tongues out for all the unkind things they had said of their sister, when she threw her arms round their necks, and kissed them heartily and lovingly, as if she were rejoiced to see them. Tears came into poor Cynthia's eyes as she looked at the beautiful sister, who had never looked more handsome and lovable than now, and whose dress was in such excellent taste for the country, that the boys never guessed what its costly simplicity meant.

And she had only one box, not nearly so big as the new cousin's had been, and this

was shouldered by Miss Miggs with a will, and borne off before the porter could rouse himself to an exertion for even a future countess.

'You are thinner,' said Sharer, as they all set off together, 'and paler too; but you'll soon get your roses back here.'

'How fresh and sweet it smells!' cried the girl, pausing to glance round. 'Oh! it smells so different up there, boys, and the people look so different, too!' She gazed with admiration at the boys' pure red and white faces, and bright locks, then she put her arm round Cynthia's neck, and kissed her.

'Darling old Cinders!' she said, 'have you been fretting after me? But I always was such a bad correspondent, and never quite sure of my spelling?'

'And of course your time must be taken up in writing to Guy,' said Ned, with feigned innocence; 'where did you address to him last?'

'I don't know where he is!' said Tishy, a fine colour now on her cheeks. 'I never write to him, nor he to me; and it wouldn't trouble me much if he is at the bottom of the sea at this moment!'

The boys gasped, but Cynthia's face brightened, and her heart leaped. She pulled Tishy's hand through her arm, and so they went a few steps before anybody spoke.

'If only Bobbie could hear!' said Tom, in a voice that spoke volumes. 'And pray what have I let out *now?*' he added, in an aggrieved voice, as Ned kicked his shins heavily.

Cynthia looked at the boys in an agony. All the way to the station she had been laying the strictest embargo on them not to breathe a syllable of Bobbie's good fortune, or reveal the fact that he was expected home that very night. This they had promised readily enough, having some vague suspicion that Cynthia was weaving

a plot to the advantage of this most contrary pair of lovers.

'Bobbie would not speak to me if he saw me,' said Tishy, her cheeks a more angry red still. 'I met him at a ball three weeks ago, and he cut me dead—though I held out my hand to him before a whole room full of people!'

Three weeks ago, thought Cynthia, and Bobbie's uncle had not been dead a fortnight. There was hope yet.

'Which shows he's more in love with you than ever,' said Sharer, drily; 'and for my part, I should like to know what Mr. Guy means, neglecting my sister in this manner.'

'He never loved me, you know,' she said, wondering at herself even as she spoke; (when had she said so much to Mrs. Transome?) but perhaps their eager, earnest faces, their real affection for Bobbie, and unselfish desire for her true happiness, moved her so that she could not but speak the truth.

'And are you tired of being a fine lady, Tishy?' said Sharer, as he put his arm round her.

'I don't know yet,' she said; 'I must have a little time to think it out . . . but I almost think I am, dear.'

'Stay with us,' said Cynthia; 'don't go back to that worldly, miserable old woman; she never was a happy one, father says!'

'No; she married for position,' said Tishy, as one who thinks aloud. 'Oh! if only Bobbie had been moderately well off!' she added, still under the influence of that strange fit of truth-speaking. 'If he had only had enough to pay the butcher, and baker, and shoemaker, I would never have looked at Guy!'

The boys drew in their breaths, but forbore to look at one another . . . dimly they saw happiness ahead, and in their souls rejoiced.

'There's father!' exclaimed Tishy, suddenly, and ran forward; then stopped

short with perhaps a twinge of jealousy to see how happy he looked with a girl clinging to his arm, while he made no haste to meet his favourite daughter.

'Is that the savage?' she said, looking round at Cynthia; 'why you never——' then forgetting dignity in joy at seeing the dear old dad, ran to, and hugged him. He kissed her very kindly, and bade her welcome, then turned to Sam's Sweetheart and said, 'This is Tishy, my dear—another of your cousins.'

The two girls looked at each other in silence. They were both tall and long-limbed as the goddesses used to be, for how, pray, could those charmers have frisked and coquetted, been pursued and sometimes overtaken, if their bodies had been as long, and their limbs as short, as most women of the present day?

But seen side by side, the blot in Tishy's beauty, long ago perceived by Guy, was at once hit, and she was no more than a beau-

tiful dairymaid (in however good style) beside the exquisite limbs and royal carriage of the nameless daughter of John Trefusis.

I think it is Edmund Burke who observes that 'an air of robustness and strength is highly prejudicial to beauty, while an appearance of fragility is no less essential to it.'

There was no fragility in the physique of Sam's Sweetheart, but Tishy saw herself as plainly by the girl's side as though in a looking-glass, and met her new relation with a coldness that vexed Amos, but convinced the boys that Tishy knew herself to play second fiddle in the matter of good looks.

The stranger, on her side, had looked at Tishy very eagerly, almost as if she recognised her, or were startled by a chance likeness; then, seeming to see her mistake, she took Tishy's hand as negligently as it was offered, and turning to Amos, resumed his arm as though it were her right.

'We were going for a little walk, my dear,' said Amos to Tishy. 'No doubt you will have a great deal to say to your sisters and brothers. We shall be home presently.'

'I think, father,' said Tishy, with spirit, 'that as I have been so long away, you might be more glad to see me.'

'That is it, my dear,' he said simply; 'you have been so long away,—perhaps too long, and so we have had to do the best we can without you. But we shall not be long;' and he moved away with Sam's Sweetheart.

Tishy stood still looking after the beautiful, tall shape that walked beside her father, and real tears of mortification came to her eyes.

'She has taken my place with father,' she said. 'Has she pushed me out of your hearts, too?' she added, looking reproachfully at the boys, who blushed guiltily, and shuffled with their feet.

'"No,' said Sharer, after a moment's hesitation; 'but we thought you were a spoiled, heartless, fine lady, ashamed of us all, since you never wrote—but now we find you just as nice as ever; why, we love you as we did before, and always will.'

'Has Bobbie been down in this part of the world lately?' said Tishy, as they all moved on again; 'and if so, has he seen *her*?'

The boys burst out laughing. No; Tishy was certainly no fine lady, and without a notion of deceitfulness about her, but it was Cynthia who replied,—

'No; he has not been here at all since New Year's Day.'

Tishy had taken off her hat as she spoke, and let the breeze play about her temples; but when they came to the wicket-gate by which she and Bobbie had stood one memorable night, she put out her hand and touched it, and a thrill ran through her.

Yonder lay the little ugly house in

which she had been so happy; and when she turned, there was the moor in all its splendour, and those distant tors with which she had been familiar since her birth.

'It is good to be here,' she said, softly, as pausing on the threshold, she kissed Cynthia once more, and hand in hand the sisters entered the house.

CHAPTER XI.

Miss Tishy Repents.

Tishy did not appear at breakfast next morning, and Mr. Trefusis thought her absence natural enough in her new *rôle* of fashionable lady, but when they were setting out for church she was still invisible, he looked displeased, and after waiting a little while, set out without her.

Now, the truth was, that Tishy's eyes were red, and it would never do for the beauty of the family (and with her high prospects, too) to be seen in church displaying two such flags of woe, so that by her own wish, and to Cynthia's secret delight, Miss Tishy remained at home. When they

were all gone, she came downstairs, and went from one room to the other, more saddened by the shabbiness around than she had been vexed by it, before she went to Mrs. Transome, and when she came to Cynthia's chair and work-basket, she sat down, and began to cry again.

The girl was proud at heart, and she had come home smarting all over at Guy's neglect of her—a neglect that seemed so much the harder to bear *here*, where her real lover had so ardently wooed her, and where she had loved him, and loved him still.

When Guy had accepted his position as her future husband, he had started with excellent intentions of doing his duty by her in that capacity; but, unfortunately, he was not equal to carrying them out, and only ten days after his return to England, left it again on a yachting expedition with an old friend.

But first he fixed the wedding day for

June, grimly promising Mrs. Transome that he would not be late for it, even though she might not see him till they met in the church.

When he wished Tishy good-bye, she asked him if he were going to see the woman he loved, to which he replied that it was possible, but she need not be uneasy as to his return, since that lady had a far nicer sense of honour than Tishy had any idea of.

'You are giving me leave to flirt, and I will,' said Tishy, in a rage.

'Do,' said Guy, who was rapidly losing his manners under the stress of his mental sufferings, and who looked ill enough to justify his yachting enterprise.

'I will,' cried Tishy, tearfully, 'and I will begin with Bobbie.'

'I wish you would end with him,' said Guy, turning on his heel, and leaving her, and that was all the farewell she got from him.

For a while, ambition, wrong-headed pride, and the love of finery, stayed the hunger of poor Tishy's heart, and she drank in admiration thirstily, and drew a keen delight out of the luxuries and pleasures with which, for the first time in her life, she was surrounded.

But grandeur may pall as easily as poverty: one may grow as weary in soul among perfect surroundings as among sordid ones; and when Tishy found out (as she very quickly did) that she was courted and followed not because of her beauty, or charm of manner, but because she was Mrs. Transome's niece and the future Countess of Thor, then the homage that she received ceased to please her, and the very beauty that might attract admirers but won no love, became less precious to her than when in Bobbie's eyes she had read her every charm. She had tasted enough triumphs already to make her indifferent to those wider ones that awaited

her in the season that approached, and in the short two months when everybody was supposed to be out of town, anticipated most of those pleasures that in a wider area only would come within her reach.

Some women might have taken a scornful pride in owning the most fashionable as well as the richest *fiancé* of the year, who achieved celebrity where others of his ilk failed, and promised to become the most conspicuous husband-elect of the season—by his absence. She had been gallant enough not to wince when she was commiserated with on the score of Lord Thor's absence, enforced through illness, but her soul had not yet stooped to lies, so that when polite inquiries were made as to his increased health, she simply said, 'I don't know.'

Clearly there was no *finesse*, nor the makings of a real heartless fine lady, about the fair Tishy, and men of fashion sighed for the loss of another Lady Teazle; and

men of heart and discernment admired her more than ever, convinced that there was some lover in the background. She was shrewd, as most Devonshire women are, and measured her beauty (which was all she had got, unless her heart went with what anatomically was a whole) by its results, and found nothing to compensate her for that true, strong throb of nature and sympathy with Bobbie that had made his love meat and drink, warmth and shelter, to her in the days before ambition blinded her, and duty to her family egged on her steps to a half-willing sacrifice.

Half willing, for she had thought then that the new lover wooed her for his own sake, and it was only later that with shame she had learned it was for hers.

Her proud, honest spirit rebelled against being the wife of any man on sufferance, taken or left as he pleased, bearing his name, yet for ever apart from the con-

genial companionship that at home she had valued, and now profoundly missed.

Probably her mind was not well regulated, and her impulses were too healthy for an artificial life to content her, or she would have married Guy thankfully, reared up a large family, enriched her own, and never looked beyond her daily duties in search of satisfaction. But on these Devonshire moors souls are sometimes hungry, if bodies are strong.

Better to be the queen of a gipsy hearth, than the despised guest at the board of a palace; and this fact Tishy had thoroughly mastered as she went to the schoolroom window and looked out. How she had longed for a sight of that familiar scene, but been too proud to show such a desire in her rare letters, for Cynthia's were rarer yet, and the boys' messages more and more cold, whilst those of her father had ceased altogether!

She would not confess to the failure of

her new life to make her happy, to the humiliation that in her secret soul her engagement to Guy cost her, to the passionate longing for her lost lover that rose stronger in her each day; but when Cynthia's simple, abrupt letter, written from the very heart, reached her, she had put Mrs. Transome by—and come.

Five days in which to lay down the false, artificial life of society, and live a natural, healthy one; five days in which (and here she trembled like a burnt child within reach of fire) if Bobbie appeared, it was a thousand chances to one if she did not throw up everything for the one good that was a necessity to her—love.

She felt little real jealousy towards the woman whom Guy loved, but the insult to her beauty, she felt keenly, and longed to avenge.

Yet if the Australian with whom he had fallen in love, were like this nameless daughter of John Trefusis whom Tishy

found established at the family hearth, it was no wonder that she was forgotten, for Tishy no more lied to her thoughts than her looking-glass, and knew that beside Sam's Sweetheart, neither here nor in the reception-room of an ambassador, could she hold a candle to the aborigine.

Supposing Bobbie should see her? Tishy clasped both hands on her breast for the hundredth time at the thought, and adored Bobbie, and hated the stranger the more fiercely with each repetition of the thought. For an hour she walked in the neglected garden that stretched to the right and back of the house—a garden that was all the sweeter, perhaps, since the hand of God had done so much for it, the hand of man so little.

She thought of her father, now speaking to his people, and his face as it had looked yesterday, brought her life of frivolity, ambition, and falsity before her more keenly than if she had heard every word of

the homily he was addressing to the people.

What riches could her sacrifice bring to a man who carried heaven in his heart, and peace upon his brow, to whom the richest gifts would be as mere dross, when once his simple wants were supplied?

His eyes rebuked her worldliness, his usually loving voice had grown cold to her; would it not grow colder yet, when she had with scant honour reached the summit of her ambition? She dropped her head down on the old sun-dial that pointed to half-past twelve, and wished that some new lover, not so poor as Bobbie, or so rich as Guy, had chosen her for herself, so that she might have retired with him, covering her wounds with some semblance of honour.

But no such preserver had appeared beneath the ægis of her engagement, all men might make love to, but none himself woo, her, and not one bold or ardent aspirant to

dispute Guy's right had yet appeared in the lists of Tishy's admirers.

And to-day was Sunday. On Wednesday she would go back to the outwardly brilliant, miserably unsatisfying life; and in June there would be the laggard bridegroom, the troops of bridesmaids . . . and beyond them the life of husband and the wife chained to one oar, and loathing each other for the enforced comradeship . . . and only that morning Cynthia had told her of how Bobbie had looked, and spoken, when he came back to claim her, and found—Guy.

And he had been turned from Mrs. Transome's door like a beggar or a dog—and she herself had inflicted the crowning, the most deliberate, insult of all as she came out and rode away. . . . but why she should grieve and sorrow so for a poor country gentleman's son I know not, save that true love will make a woman (and a man too) as unreasonably passionate as a

babe that cries for the moon, and would clamber up and break his neck in trying to reach it, were there none to prevent him.

Tishy had not thought very much that morning of Sam's Sweetheart, but somehow she thought again of Bobbie as the young party came in from church; and while the boys kissed her, and condoled with her headache, the stranger stood apart, and coaxed a rabbit to her shoulder.

'But where is father?' said Tishy, looking round; 'and Cynthia?'

'He stopped to speak to a—a parishioner,' said Tom, averting his head to hide a blush; 'and Cynthia stayed with him; they'll be here directly.'

They strolled about with her so happily after this, that, except by Sharer, Sam's Sweetheart was quite forgotten, but seemed content enough with her thoughts when dinner brought them together, Amos, with something of his old repressed look of suffering, heading the meal.

The stranger watched him anxiously (while other eyes watched her), then, just as the flagging conversation at the table seemed about to die a natural death, she said,—

'Cousin, did you see that handsome young man in church, sitting just opposite us? He looked so sad, and so miserable; but he was no stranger, for some of the people stood up as he came through the aisle!'

Her words exploded like a bomb. The boys looked at Tishy so apprehensively that she felt herself concerned, and listened for more, while Cynthia drew in her breath, and Amos thought of Guy, and meditated flight.

'He was too young to have known father,' said the girl; 'but he looked at me so hard that I thought he must have seen and spoken to me somewhere—perhaps in the ship coming home—and he was angry because I had forgotten him! Do you

know his name?' she added, fixing her beautiful eyes on Amos's face, 'for perhaps I shall remember it—and I should like to speak to him!'

Cynthia had only half trusted Amos that morning, and was to be betrayed, as all half-hearted people are.

'His name, my dear?' said Amos—sorry for Tishy, but supposing her to stand in her ambition as firm as he stood in his duty—'his name is Robert Sands, a very old friend of mine and the boys; I think they call him Bobbie.'

And in the silence that followed, the father retreated.

CHAPTER XII.

CINDERS AND TISHY.

'CINDERS,' cried Tishy, when the two girls were alone, 'you have deceived me —you knew that he was here, and you made me cry, and kept me away from church on purpose.'

'No,' said Cynthia, truthfully enough, 'I did not know it; but even if I had, where would have been the good of your seeing him? It would only have made you miserable, for you say yourself he wouldn't speak to you.'

'Can he have heard that I was coming home?' said Tishy, her cheeks rose-red

with excitement, her whole body trembling as she stood.

'No,' said Cynthia, 'for if he had, I am sure he would have stayed away, I could see by the way he spoke to me and father that he had not the least idea of your being here. He only arrived late last night, and he is going away again to-morrow.'

'To-morrow!' echoed Tishy, blankly, her arms falling to her sides, and all the colour fading out of her face; 'but perhaps—you know he and the boys are such friends—he might . . . . by chance . . . . come over to see them this afternoon?'

'He *was* coming,' said Cynthia, 'but I begged him not to. I even left father, and ran back to make sure that he *would* not, and told him we were all going to afternoon service at West Tor with father, and to have tea afterwards at the Farm, so that we should not be home till nearly midnight!'

'Cynthia,' cried Tishy, lifting her grand arms above her head with a gesture that would not have disgraced Mrs. Siddons, 'I hate you!' and then she fell down in a heap, and cried as if her heart would break.

'Why?' said Cynthia, cruelly. 'You don't mean to marry him, and he won't marry you, so what would be the use of his coming over here just to walk back again?'

'He could not have refused to shake hands with me—to speak to me,' cried poor Tishy between her heavy sobs; 'it could have hurt nobody, and it would have eased this dreadful pain *here!*' and she pressed both hands to her heart.

'Would it?' said Cynthia, sitting down opposite her sister, and hardening herself to play out the part she had resolved upon. 'I think it would have ached worse. If the mere thought of seeing him upsets you so, what would it be if you ever *met* him, and perhaps he was kind? You can't eat your cake and have it, and

as you won't give up Guy, you must give up Bobbie.'

Tishy pushed her beautiful, rich hair back, and got up from the floor. 'He would not marry me even if I asked him now,' she said, 'and I can't do it. I do value the things that Guy can give me, and it is dreadful to be so very poor, even Bobbie's love might wear out after a bit!'

'Unless it has worn out already,' said Cynthia, drily; 'he never took his eyes off Sam's Sweetheart all church time, and he doesn't look in the least like wearing the willow.'

'He cut me, you know,' said poor Tishy; 'and the boys said that looked like love . . . . and I had on such a lovely gown, and all the men were running after me that night.'

'Perhaps he thought you too fine a lady to speak to him,' said Cynthia, as at the thought of her triumph Tishy dried her eyes, and looked a shade less forlorn; 'but

promise me one thing;' and Cynthia came up to her sister and leant her cheek against the girl's wet one: 'that you won't send or write to Bobbie, or in any way try to let him know that you are here.'

Tishy drew herself quickly and proudly away from the caress, and her blue eyes flashed.

'The Trefusis women do not beg favours of unwilling lovers,' she said, haughtily, as she turned to the door; 'and I think you are very unkind, and I shall never lo—ove you so much again,' she added, with a sob, as she went out; but as she ran upstairs she said to herself, 'Who knows that by accident, or through a servant, he may find out that I am here?'

But all that afternoon and evening her heart throbbed, and waited in vain — in vain she stole out to the wicket-gate, and stood there after dark and stood there with her body all one tremble of longing for the sound of his step, the touch of his hand,

frightened at herself, at the overmastering love that had slept awhile, but to awaken like a giant refreshed; but the stars came out, the quiet night fell, but hither came not Bobbie that night, nor would he have come had he known who it was that stood there awaiting him.

* * * *

As Tishy sat by the open window of her bedroom later, a gentle knock came at the door, and supposing it to be Cynthia (with whom she was still angry), she said 'Come in,' coldly, and without looking round as some one entered. The only light in the room came from the stars, but there was enough by which to see each other's faces, as turning at last, Tishy saw that not Cynthia, but Sam's Sweetheart, was beside her.

'May I stay a little while with you?' said the girl, gently; 'we have hardly spoken to each other yet, and in the day all your time will be taken up with Cynthia and the boys.'

'Yes,' said Tishy, in a voice that was not cold, only indifferent, 'you may sit down. We have hardly spoken to each other, as you say.'

She had been too intensely pre-occupied with herself to more than barely notice, and then only slightingly or jealously, the stranger, whose presence in the family was at once an anomaly and a riddle that she had not troubled herself to try and puzzle out.

She was glad that her eyes were just then dry, and that in the dim light her tear-stained looks might escape detection; but she wondered what the girl wanted to say to her at that time of night, and surely she would not have the impertinence to speak to her about Bobbie.

Cynthia had neither written to, nor told her of the girl's curiosity about Guy and herself, while as to the fable about John Trefusis's marriage, that was not worth setting down either.

'Cousin,' said the girl, and Tishy started, 'I have wished to see you so much, and you will be going away again so soon.'

'Yes,' said Tishy, coldly, and with no small wonder as to what this was leading to.

'Perhaps they will have told you,' said the young stranger, 'about my father, and of how I came here because he bade me come, and I had to do my duty.'

'No,' said Tishy, looking up at the sky and thinking of Bobbie; 'Cynthia wrote me that you were here — and — and your name,' added Tishy, unconscious of sarcasm; 'but what duty could have brought you over here?' she added, with a little faint curiosity in her voice: 'duty to whom?'

'To Guy Trefusis,' said Yuntha, wondering if all Englishwomen were as cold and unsympathetic as these two sisters.

'And what has Guy Trefusis to do with you?' said Tishy, more coldly than ever,

and with a faint jealousy wakening in her mind.

'Nothing,' said the stranger. 'Probably he does not know of my existence; but my father made me promise to come to England, and see if his heir was acting as a faithful steward to his inheritance.'

'And if not?' said Tishy, scornfully, and with rising anger at the young interloper's coolness.

'That is my own affair,' said Sam's Sweetheart, with a pride that more than equalled Tishy's.

'And did you come here to-night to question me as to the moral powers, and business capacities, of my future husband?' said Tishy, with angry eyes.

'Is he your future husband?' said the girl, mournfully, 'then I am sorry—and you are throwing away your life's happiness—for love is best.'

Something in her voice reached Tishy's heart, she looked up, and by the faint

light saw slow, heavy tears falling down the girl's cheeks. Here was trouble too, and heart-ache, all for love, and Tishy felt drawn to one who was perchance suffering as keenly as herself.

'I saw your lover in church, this morning,' went on the girl, her voice steady through her tears; 'but I did not know who he was, till the boys told me this afternoon—I knew that he was not happy, and in his eyes was a look'—she paused, but Tishy knew that such a look this girl had seen in the eyes of some lover of her own; 'and he is more than handsome, and surely no one could throw such a heart away, for if you loved him, no other could bring you so much pure happiness.'

'Why do you plead for him?' cried Tishy, struggling against the girl's influence, yet feeling irresistibly drawn to her.

'Because you are too good to throw your life away for an idea,' said Sam's Sweetheart. 'You are no fine lady who could

live without love; and you never loved the heir, and love begets love, and if you married him, you would be always thinking of your lover.' Here the girl covered her face with a passionate gesture of despair, as if she had lived through such an agony, but failed to overcome it. 'And your father and those who love you here would be wretched to see you suffer, and so no one would be happy in the end.'

Tishy saw that gesture, and felt herself in the presence of a sorrow greater than her own. She forgot her jealousy of the girl's beauty, forgot even Bobbie, as she said, involuntarily, 'You have lost him—he is dead?'

'He is dead to me,' said the girl, and then the two looked at one another, and their arms went round each other's necks, and from that moment, both being so generous of soul and heart, there was perfect friendship and love between them.

'But he is going away,' said Tishy, in a

whisper; 'he is angry with me, and he is so poor.'

'Does money mend broken hearts?' said the girl, in her hopeless voice. 'He is only angry with you, and there is no bar between you that you cannot leap. He is not dead, or dishonoured, or married.'

Tishy thought she knew the girl's story, as the last words escaped her lips, but still, possessed by her own troubles, put aside inquiry to a more convenient season.

'I cannot send to him, you know,' she said, 'and to-morrow he will be gone.'

'But he will come back,' said Sam's Sweetheart; 'and when he finds that you have chosen between love and gold, he will love you all the better, and you will be happy.'

Longer they talked, but it was all of Bobbie, and morning found one of the girls smiling in her sleep, and the other looking out with aching eyes at a future that held neither hope, nor happiness, nor love.

CHAPTER XIII.

Bobbie and Tishy.

Now, on Saturday morning, breakfast was hardly over and the vicar departed, before the boys pounced on Sam's Sweetheart, and hustled her out of the room and out of sight; nor were any of them seen again by Tishy that day, as shall hereafter be shown. She felt aggrieved at this wholesale desertion of her, especially as she had intended to spend the morning with her new friend; and, not having yet forgiven Cynthia, she went out presently by herself to the half kitchen, half flower-garden, that stretched out far behind the unbeautiful little house in which she was born.

But here in spring and summer were pleasant sights, and smells, and sounds, and as she went picking a bud here, and smelling a young leaf there, she drew the warm breath of the April morning into her very soul, and thought of the crowded rooms, the tainted atmosphere, that even in palaces is breathed by those who dwell in great cities.

She came at last to the low wall that divided the tangled garden from the meadow, and leaning her arms upon it looked abroad.

Had she ever been away, she wondered, as she gazed on the familiar scene, then looked down at the pink cotton that covered her arms and bosom, the very gown that she had stitched last year as fellow to Cynthia's, and worn with such a heavy heart inside it for the sake of Bobbie?

She had found it that morning when she woke, laid out neatly on the chair by her

bed, and with some wonder at herself, she had put it on, surprised to find how easily it fitted her, just as if her body should shrink or grow big with her soul, poor Tishy!

How little she was to any one living, she thought, to her father, to the boys, and Cynthia! Even the stranger left her without a word, after the close confidence of their talk the night before, while as to Guy . . .

She had tied a handkerchief over her head when she came out, so that her splendid hair was hidden; her figure might have been Cynthia's in the ill-made gown that travestied its beauties, and some one who came quickly out of the house, and approached her, never doubted that she was Cynthia, and wondered what her business with him could be.

'Do not come and see us this afternoon or evening, for we shall not be at home,' she had said; 'but come to me in the

kitchen garden at ten o'clock to-morrow morning.'

He had promised mechanically, thinking there would be just time to catch his train afterwards, and he had always liked her, poor Cinders, and she had been the best gooseberry in the world.

Tishy did not move as footsteps dulled by moss approached. It was her sister, no doubt, and she was out of heart with her, and wanted none of her company.

'Cynthia!' said a voice close by, and the girl trembled in every limb, and dared not turn, while two heads in a distant window nodded together in the violence of their excitement, 'it is ten o'clock, and I am here. Is anything the matter with *her*?' he added, fiercely, and snatching her arm from the wall, turned her round to face him.

'Do not beat a woman, even with a flower,' says Mahomet, and Bobbie felt himself a brute, and that he had hurt her,

when with one arm across her face, and so hiding it, a sob broke from the girl's breast. To a woman's ear it would have suggested relief or joy, to the man's it only spoke pain.

'Why did you tell me to come,' he said, more quietly, 'unless she is in trouble? And that is not likely—if you had seen her as I saw her, less than three weeks ago, beautiful in spite of being dressed to death, but with no thought for her past lover, or dread of her future responsibilities. By heaven! it was sickening!'

The girl's head had dropped forward on her arm, but the bright hair showed on her temples, and Bobbie touched it familiarly, yet wistfully, as for old acquaintance sake, then said with that mirth whose echo is sadness, 'Has she sent you down some of her fine lady-washes, Cinders, and is she dyeing you to find an excuse for herself?'

Then such a sob as Cynthia's heart and

lungs could not have compassed broke from the girl, and her arm dropped, leaving the two face to face with each other.

For a few seconds he looked at her petrified, then he raised his hat, and turned as one in the act of departing.

'I had an appointment with your sister for ten o'clock,' he said, coldly, 'and your servant said that I should find her here; pray excuse my mistake;' and the next moment there was visible to Tishy that most hateful sight on earth to one who truly loves—her lover's back. But he had not gone six steps when a low cry followed him.

His pulses were beating as madly as hers. He turned in spite of himself, and saw her, his sweetheart, his Letty, in her old cotton gown, her cheeks pale, but with the love-light in her eyes that Guy had never kindled, and taking two steps to his one as she advanced; what wonder if a gentle collision ensued, in which the girl's

arms clung for safety closer than the man's?

'Oh, Bobbie!' she said, with that simplicity of love which knows nothing of eloquence, 'I do *love* you so!'

His first thrill of joy at the mere sight of her was over. Even with her arms around him, Bobbie's jealous soul found time to think, and steel his heart against her.

'I know I have been wicked to you,' she said, her tear-stained cheek pressed to his coat-sleeve; 'but I love you, and if we had only got enough to buy food and lodging decently, I would ask you to marry me, and take me away to-morrow!'

'Food and lodging,' he thought, 'would not his inheritance buy that?' for of course she knew of it, and that was why she and her love for him had come back, and Cynthia had contrived the plot to bring them together, and the very maid-of-all-work yonder in the window was laughing at him

. . . . no doubt Letty had been deserted by Guy, or a new heir had been discovered, and she had come back to him for any reason but that of pure love.

'Letty,' he said, and oh, how sweet the name sounded from his lips! 'you have thrown me over twice, and now you would like to make a fool of me again; but you shall not do it;' and he unloosed her arms, which fell to her sides heavily, while her head sank on her breast, and her cheeks went white as snow. He had turned to go without glancing at her, but paused irresolute and looked, and surely the agony of her face might have touched any man's heart, most of all the one that so passionately loved her.

'Good-bye, Letty,' he said, and would have touched her hand, but she drew it away, and when she lifted her head there were no tears in her eyes, and she said coldly and proudly,—

'Good-bye; and will you please try and

forget that I offered myself to you, and that you refused me? I would have shared your poverty, lived with you as poorly and worryingly as we live here; would have given up all that my marriage with Lord Thor would have brought me, and a woman cannot do more than that to prove her love, and the man who doubts it, is no longer worthy of it. Go!' cried Tishy, without a tremble in her voice, 'and never let me see your face again. I would not marry you now if you were as rich as Guy!'

Bobbie stood transfixed. Was this acting? If so, how well she did it, and how lovely she looked in her pride and pallor! He snatched her hand, and held it so fast that she could not have loosed it without a struggle, and said,—

'You have not heard?'

Her eyes dilated with a sudden suspicion, fear, and question all in one, then she said quite calmly,—

'You are going to be married?'

'You have heard no news of me whatever?' he went on without answering her, while his eager, jealous eyes searched her face; 'the boys and Cynthia have told you nothing about my affairs, of love or money?'

'They told me nothing,' said the girl, wearily; 'I did not expect to see you here, and Cynthia has been telling stories,—but, pray, sir,' she added, trying to withdraw her hand, 'do not detain any longer a lady whose suit you have just rejected!'

She had thrown her head back, and there was no love-light in her eyes now. As she looked at him, the colour had come back to her lips and cheeks, for she had acted nobly according to her lights; and nobly, indeed, she now shone in her lover's eyes, as at last understanding, he caught her in his arms and kissed her passionately.

'How dare you!' she cried, putting out her whole strength to free herself, and feeling that she hated him, but he only held her the faster, and kissed her the more, with

the heart-hunger of over a year pressing upon him.

'Letty, Letty, Letty!' he said, and at his voice, she ceased to struggle, feeling vaguely that her ship had come into harbour and that the last half-hour had been only an ugly dream, and pride was good, but love was better. As he held her from him for a moment, their eyes met, and then their arms went round each other, for between them was that deep true love that, howsoever they might fall out, howsoever suffer, there was no trouble or smart on earth that might not be healed so their hearts beat together.

'But are you going to be married, Bobbie?' whispered the girl presently.

'Yes,' said Bobbie, 'I'm going to marry you.'

'When?' she said, thinking of Guy.

'Next week.'

And then he told her his great, good news.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE SCORNER SCORNED.

'THE boys are not coming home to dinner to-day?' said Amos, when he found only Cynthia in the dining-room at half-past one; 'and where is Tishy?' he added, looking round.

Cynthia put her finger on her lip, and leading her father to a side window that looked on the kitchen garden, looked out.

A young man and a girl were standing among the gooseberry bushes, looking as if each found the other the most beautiful object in creation, and, indeed, the sun never shone on a happier, handsomer pair.

'My dear,' said Amos, nervously, 'that young man looks to me like Bobbie Sands; and what can he have to say to Tishy among the gooseberry bushes?'

'A great deal,' said Cynthia, putting her hands behind her back and showing a pretty colour in the face she turned upon Amos; 'they are going to make each other happy, father, and us too—and Guy into the bargain.'

'But this is very premature, my dear,' said Amos, in a tone of rebuke; 'it is not at all handsome behaviour to Guy, and I cannot possibly recognise such fast-and-loose conduct. I suppose this young man will be coming in presently, and I do not wish to be unpleasant, so you can send me some bread and cheese to the study. When Guy formally releases your sister, then there will be time enough to talk of entering into an engagement with this young man. There is to me something indecent in rushing out of one engagement and into

another at a moment's notice in this way; and I fear she is making herself cheap, and that is a pity. I am not pleased with Tishy, my dear, not pleased;' and so saying the Rev. Amos retired.

Perhaps his absence did not greatly check the joyousness of the trio who presently sat down to the frugal board, while the tale of Bobbie's good luck furnished more satisfaction than the finest meats and wines in the world. Amos in body sat apart, but in his secret heart he was glad of the fact, though not as to its mode of accomplishment, and once or twice he smiled when the sound of those young, distant voices reached him, but was a little surprised when presently, after a knock, his door opened to admit Bobbie.

The young man came humbly enough, and told how accident alone had brought about his happiness that morning, upon which Amos relented somewhat, but refused to recognise any engagement between

the young people till Guy Trefusis had released her from her promise. Till then Bobbie must not meet Tishy, either openly or privately, nor should there be any engagement between them.

'But, sir,' cried Bobbie, whose face had lengthened with each word, 'she doesn't even know where he is; as likely as not she won't even get a line from him, or see him between this and the wedding-day, when she won't be there,' added Bobbie, savagely, 'for I'll run away with her myself first!'

'I did not know he was so careless and neglectful a lover,' said Amos, with troubled looks, 'I never desired the marriage; but she has given him her promise, and he alone can give it her back.'

Bobbie stood downcast,—he had entered all flushed with happiness, as *débonnair* and handsome a young man as woman's eye could desire, but the prospect of waiting three months for Tishy's lagging bride-

groom was more than even love could endure.

'Did you woo your wife like that, sir?' he burst out, suddenly; 'do you think a man deserves any consideration from a lady's hands when he treats her as Lord Thor has treated your daughter?'

'Tishy's mother was not ambitious,' said Amos, gravely; 'she made up her mind for once and all when she deliberately chose a life of poverty by my side. Had her daughter been equally steadfast, she would have no need to complain of the conduct of a man who must have known for what reason she accepted him.'

Bobbie looked round the room,—perhaps for the first time he realised what Letty had voluntarily given up when she offered to share the poverty that she believed almost equal to this.

'Thank God,' said the young man, heartily, 'that she may now have love and a competence too,—and I'll wait three

months for her, sir, as I would wait ten years; but if he comes home before the time's up, I shall tell him he can take a back seat, for she is going to marry *me*, and you shall marry me to her next day, sir, by special license.'

Amos looked at the impetuous young man, and sighed. It seemed so long ago that he was almost as young, and nearly as impetuous. He went to the window that looked out on the moor, remembering how his wife and he had stood there together on the evening of their home-coming, the chilly outlook, the bare room, beautiful to them because of the joy in their hearts.

'I may go to her, sir?' said Bobbie; 'she is expecting me, and I am sure did not anticipate your opposition. I cannot come here again in defiance of your commands, but no doubt we shall meet in town;' and the young man bowed and retired.

'There is no keeping young lovers apart,'

thought poor Amos; 'a brick wall is nothing to them—they will drill a hole through it, and talk to one another—but Guy is remiss, very remiss; he has conspicuously failed in his duty towards my daughter.'

And then (having performed his own by Bobbie) he put on his hat and coat and went out by the front door, not knowing the wonderful events that were just then happening in the kitchen garden.

* * * *

For that day was to be one of surprises, and hardly had Bobbie entered the study, and Tishy hugged her sister, then flown off to the garden to muse on her happiness and await her lover, when Cynthia heard a man's firm tread cross the hall-door threshold, and come straight on to the room where she was.

It could not be one of the boys, and yet no stranger would enter in that way, but when the door opened, she found herself face to face with Guy Trefusis.

'Guy!' she exclaimed, and started back, while her breath came quickly, 'we did not expect you—we——'

'I suppose not,' he said, taking her cold hand, 'but when I got to Mrs. Transome's house last night, the servants told me I should find her here—so I came on at once—like an eager lover,' he added, laughing harshly and bitterly to himself.

An eager lover! Ay, he looked that, if a man expects to find death, not love, at his journey's end; if he hurries forward to meet no sweets from loving lips, no tender breast upon which to lay his aching head, but rather to embrace a cold spectre that stands between him and his heart's desire . . . yet even as Cynthia's cheek paled to see the ravages that suffering had wrought in him, she saw happiness for him far beyond, and spoke.

'You would like to see Tishy,' she said. 'She is out there in the garden;' and she pointed through the window to where her

sister was dimly visible, her back towards them, her arms leaning on the low garden wall.

He went without another word, and Cynthia's heart went with him as with clasped hands she stood stock still, praying that Bobbie's interview with her father might not be over for a few minutes yet.

Tishy heard those manly steps approaching, and a smile stole round her lips. For a moment she shut her eyes, thinking of the change in her fortunes that had come since she had last heard them. Then she turned, and with arms outstretched, said in that voice of love that knows no imitation,—

'Oh, my darling, what a long time you have been!'

Guy recoiled like a man who has got his death-blow, and Tishy recoiled too, so that she bumped against the garden wall, and as nearly as possible went over it backwards.

Then she put her hand before her face—perhaps to hide its redness, or its joy, or its tears—how could he tell?

'Tishy,' he said, abruptly, and she thought how harsh his voice was, and how sweet the one that said 'Letty,' and Guy, catching that exquisite look of happiness on her half-hidden lips, faltered, then forced himself to go on, 'I have come here to-day to make a last earnest attempt to persuade you to end an engagement that can only end in the misery of us both. Will you be generous, and give me back my freedom?'

'What would you do with it?' said Tishy, taking away her hand and looking up, the mirth of the April morning in her eyes, and dancing in the dimples and curves of her lovely, joyous face.

'I should go and find the woman I love, and marry her.'

'Well, go then,' said Tishy, jumping up briskly, 'but—but you heard what I called

you just now?' Here she turned her back on him, and her body became gradually shaken by what must surely be sobs, 'can you—can you, with a clear conscience, go to make her so happy, and leave me so—so miserable?'

'Good God!' cried Guy, in heartfelt misery; 'my poor girl, you don't mean to say—to say, that you—you love me?'

'Haven't you done everything to—to make me love you?' said Tishy, with heaving shoulders turned upon him; 'could your de—devotion and attention and—and loving letters in your absence fail to win my heart? I should be ungrateful indeed if I did not tru—truly love you!'

For a moment Guy stood aghast; then he burst out laughing.

'It's all very well for you to joke,' said Tishy, in a voice that trembled; 'I've given you leave to go to her, but pray what is going to become of me?'

'I will settle ten thousand a-year on you

if you like,' said Guy, eagerly, 'and then you can be happy with that good-looking young fellow I saw here in January; for as to your being in love with me—why, the idea is ridiculous!'

'Very,' said a voice behind them, and both man and girl turned to see Bobbie in the path. 'I never believed it myself—and the fact is, Miss Trefusis and I settled only this morning to get married as soon as possible.'

In that moment of blessed relief which opened out to him a vista of heaven beyond, Guy put his arm round Tishy's neck and kissed her lips with all his heart.

'Sir!' cried Bobbie, furiously.

'Don't be angry,' cried Tishy, running to Bobbie and taking his hand; 'he never did it before—at least hardly ever—and he never will again, unless you give him leave,' she added, as she rubbed her face against Bobbie's hand.

For a moment the two men looked at

each other; then, simultaneously, their hands went out and met in a close grip, and from that moment to their death they were loyal and true friends; and in time Tishy grew to love Guy as if he had been her brother. But that ten thousand a-year was never settled upon her, though Guy consoled himself with hopes that he might some day be a godfather.

CHAPTER XV.

Every man think on his true love,
And mark him to the Trinitie:
For to God I make my avow,
This day I will not flee.

GUY went out to the moor with pulses throbbing and blood on fire, with the knowledge that with no dishonour to himself, no wrong done to Tishy he was *free.*

He walked like a man intoxicated for above a mile, then threw himself face downwards on the moor, and gave himself up to the passionate joy that so overflowed his soul as to leave no room for a single doubt or fear as to the future. . . . . Already in imagination he had overtaken

that slender, lovely shape that during the past months he had, waking and sleeping, pursued with his thoughts, and now she was in his arms, he felt the very touch of her velvet mouth, the cling of her arms, her haunting blue eyes met his, and aloud he cried with all the passion of a strong man's hungry heart,—

'Yuntha, ... Yuntha. . . . .'

How often had they not gone tottering and trembling along the forest path, hand in hand, body yearning to body, yet not daring to look at one another lest wild words should leap up, or, the barriers of speech once broken down, they should be swept away by the torrent of love that each held in check! how often had they sighed and turned back to the bush when nearing Bathurst, feeling that they *must* not, *could* not part! . . .

For months the approach of a certain miserable day had haunted him, but now his heart leaped up as he thought of the

one that should be, with the flame of the Southern Cross for the bridal torch, with the green forest for their couch, and the whisper of the west wind for lullaby, and the fragrance of the night-lilac in their nostrils . . . but of how the marriage-knot was first to be tied, Guy did not trouble himself to think, since his mind had not yet even glanced at the possibility that he might not be able to find her. What would she say to him? How would she look? Would her beauty have worn away with watching and waiting for him as his had by longing? She who had so dimmed all others in his eyes, that while he could say—

> I see her in the dewy flowers,
> I see her sweet and fair;
> I hear her in the tunefu' birds,
> I hear her charm the air,

he could also remember the least of her beauties by the failures of other women—this savage who had not needed to live

in the time of Ovid to smile gracefully, while no Athenian woman of most studied gait and carriage could have walked with one half her grace. He thought of her with every breath he drew; in the very faults and vices of those around him, her purity, bravery, and truth showed but the more conspicuously; he compared her free beautiful life with that of others, and felt himself suffocate and die in the impure atmosphere into which he found himself plunged.

In that brief period when he had struggled to do his duty by Tishy, and accompanied her more or less publicly, he had returned for a short time to that life which had long ago so sickened him as to drive him by mere force of contrast into a country girl's arms.

And her honesty had been only skin deep; and where was her conscience beside that of the savage, whose clear glance would have pierced all the shams and

deceits of a world in which the wages of sin are success?

So that one day he had run away from his duty, with some wild thought of throwing it behind him, and, seeking Yuntha with a lie on his lips, tell her that he had returned free.

But the thought only came as a maddening temptation and was quickly cast out; but after months of miserable wandering he came to the resolve to once more throw himself upon Tishy's mercy, and ask her for both their sakes to release him.

For, would she not have tired by now of *chiffons* and the gratification of a hitherto dormant sense that has its parallel in that unconscious eating out of the hunger of past generations, in the alderman of to-day?

There were generations upon generations of ill-dressed female ancestors to be revenged in the person of Tishy, who seemed never to tire of selecting and trying on those combinations that were to make her

as Colonel de Carteret said, 'By Gad, the finest woman about town.'

But Guy thought he had already seen signs in her of dissatisfaction with the life she led, when he so abruptly left her, so that it was not without some hope, that he had returned unexpectedly, and on going straight to Mrs. Transome, found that lady detained in town by a severe cold, and in a state of great indignation against Tishy.

'Who knows what nonsense she may not learn down there?' said Tishy's aunt, feeling keenly the sting of her niece's ingratitude. 'She may even meet with that objectionable young man!'

Guy devoutly hoped she might, as he made his adieus, and left the house with more hope in his heart than he had brought to it.

CHAPTER XVI.

AMOS AND GUY ARE AGREED.

THE Rev. Amos was detained abroad much later than usual that afternoon, and did not, indeed, reach home till past six, being met on the threshold (to his intense amazement) by Guy. Some wild idea that Bobbie had summoned his rival hither by electricity crossed Amos's mind, as he shook hands with the young man, relieved to see him looking so bright and happy, albeit haggard, as one who has suffered much.

'Perhaps you have heard,' said Amos, nervously, as they crossed the hall to-

gether, 'about Tishy, that she has changed her mind ——'

'No,' said Guy, 'not changed it, but only gone back to her original one. He is as good a fellow as ever lived, and I wish them happiness with all my soul.'

'Dear me,' said Amos, as they entered the dining-room together, 'this is all very fortunate, and I shall be able to wish them happiness too, when they come in,' he added, with some shyness, as he looked through the window at the lovers' enamoured backs. 'But where are the boys?' he added to Cynthia, who just entered; 'and where is my little Miss Sweetheart?'

'I told the boys they might stay out late,' said Cynthia, blushing guiltily, 'and perhaps they have gone further than they intended' (which was true enough, for in going so far afield, they had been betrayed into a most signal disaster).

'Who is Miss Sweetheart?' said Guy,

as Cynthia poured out her father's tea.

'Did not Tishy write to tell you?' said Amos, looking as confounded as most people are at finding their joys and sorrows unknown to the world at large; 'it is quite a little history.'

'She is an aborigine,' said Cynthia, as her father floundered painfully, and blushed; and then she went away, leaving the two men together.

'An aborigine!' said Guy, the colour leaping to his cheek. 'From what part of Australia does she come?' and nearer than ever to his longing soul seemed Yuntha, now that he knew one of her kind actually dwelt beneath Amos's roof.

'I don't know,' said Amos, setting down his cup; 'all I know is—that she is John Trefusis's daughter.'

Guy started up — a weight seemed to roll from his shoulders, and Yuntha came nearer yet, as he cried, 'John Trefusis

married, after all — and this girl is his heiress?'

'She is an aborigine, cousin,' said Amos, gently, 'and I believe marriages between her people and whites are not legal, even if performed, and we have no proof that any such ceremony took place.'

'Then why is she here?' said Guy, stopping short in his stride.

'To see that you are doing your duty by the estates,' said Amos, simply; 'it seems that he laid this charge on the child when he died, but when she has seen you and fulfilled it' (and here Amos's voice faltered), 'she talks of going home.'

'She will see me soon enough,' said Guy, carelessly, 'and can go back with me if she likes, for I shall be starting for Australia in a few days, unless she would like to remain and nurse the estates for me. And why should there not be a coloured Countess of Thor?' he added, looking keenly at Amos. 'If she were

good and beautiful, and made a man happy, why should the world despise her because she is a few shades behind the stupid pink and white of an Englishwoman?'

Perhaps Amos did not see this insult to his daughter's complexion, for he was thinking of Miss Sweetheart's clear, glowing skin, beside which an English brunette looked dark and cold, just as his own cheek was like parchment to her fairness.

'I see no reason why she should not, cousin,' said Amos, blushing for his match-making thoughts, yet even more for the young man who seemed to have so swiftly arrived at a prudent decision. 'But this young girl might pass for an Englishwoman, her skin is so clear and beautiful, and she has blue eyes, as all the Trefusis' have.'

'And if you could only see the girl I have in my mind,' cried Guy, striding about, and not listening to Amos; 'so lovely, helpful, sweet—and honourable,

too, in her dealings with other women beyond belief — Oh, sir! there is not a white woman living to match her in purity, bravery, and truth!'

Amos caught his breath, then said, 'Your speech would sound like a fable, cousin, but that my little Sweetheart is just such another as you describe, and I blame myself for ever having thought ill of these savages, whom one must admire, not despise. And so you love one of these people?' he added, and sighed.

'Yes,' said Guy, for the first time showing some signs of shame; 'your daughter never loved me, and in Australia I met a young girl who saved my life, and whom I learned to love. I offered to remain there, and let those at home think me dead, and she might have consented to this, had I not told her of Tishy.'

Amos thought of Miss Sweetheart, and sighed again.

'She sent me back to fulfil my promise,'

said Guy, 'and I came here with the marriage certificate in my pocket, but resolved to throw myself upon your daughter's mercy. She was not here, but in town she refused to release me—the rest of the story you know. And now I am free to go to *her*—to tell her I come without dishonour; and were she ten thousand times browner than she is, I would bring her home, and place her at the head of my house.'

Amos looked at the passionate young lover and nodded—he could understand all this frenzy for an aborigine, now that he had seen Miss Sweetheart.

'It seems to me that the young women out there are very excellently brought up,' said Amos, 'and might teach us fathers over here some sober lessons that it would be well for us to learn. Dearly as I love my own daughters, I cannot but see in them an absence of that spirit of sweet dutifulness and generous self-sacrifice that

guides each action and thought of our little Sweetheart.'

'I am impatient to see her,' said Guy, for a moment putting aside the intoxicating sense of his own bliss; 'but I must be leaving you soon, sir, as I have some arrangements to make before leaving England early next week.'

'To-morrow is Easter Sunday,' said Amos, gently; 'stay with us to-night, and over the Sabbath, it will give you time to acquaint yourself with your new cousin, and she has desired greatly to see you.'

'Ah!' said Guy, coming back from the window, 'to be sure—she will want to cross-question me—and who knows,' he added, laughing, 'but that she may turn out to be the real heiress after all? And then, my dear, sweet, lovely, precious girl'—and he threw out his arms as though to seize some one—'you'll love me for myself, as I love you for yours—and I'll find you if I

have to beat every mile of bush, from one end of Australia to the other!'

Amos looked at the young man in astonishment; why Bobbie was nothing to him, and he had never before seen his quiet, self-contained cousin in the least like this —his eyes flashing with light and love, his lips eager and laughing as a school-boy's, his whole bearing that of one who longs to be up and away, knowing that out yonder true heart and eyes counted each moment till his return.

As he gazed, Amos thought sadly of what a pair Guy and Sweetheart would have made, it struck him too as extraordinary that there should be two young girls, brought up among savages, each so duteous, well beloved, and lovely.

'It is late for her to be abroad,' he said, approaching the window and looking out anxiously.

The dusk was enfolding all, and in her cloak of gray had already hidden the

lovers' figures, a chill wind was blowing up from the moor, and Cynthia looked like a ghost as she stole from the gloom of the room behind them to Amos's side.

'Father,' she said, timidly, 'I am getting a little uneasy about the boys, they have never been out so late as this before.'

'And I am uneasy about your cousin,' said Amos, in a tone of gentle rebuke; 'they are strong and hardy, but it is cold for a young girl who thinks only of wrapping up other people's bodies warmly, but never of her own.'

Cynthia thought of the boys' baskets that she had so recklessly filled with all the meat and food she could lay hands on, and of how she had whispered to Sharer, 'Stay out as long as ever you can, so as not to interfere with the lovers!' but now, seeing how early in the day things had settled themselves, she wished with all her soul that she had moderated her commands.

But the night drew in, and the lovers had at last sought the house which was empty of Guy, who had gone out to look for the missing party; while Amos, faithful as ever to the duty that lay nearest to him, sat in his fireless study writing in patient pain the conclusion to his Easter-Day sermon. Then he came out, and bestirred himself as no one had ever seen the parson stir himself before; but though many a lanthorn danced like a will-o'-the-wisp over the moors that night, they danced in vain to light the footsteps of Amos's Sweetheart, and his five tall, bright lads.

CHAPTER XVII.

Amos Reproaches Himself.

When the Easter anthem rose that morning, Amos's congregation scarcely knew whether to marvel most at his troubled looks (he had not gone to bed that night) or at the absence of his whole family from the long narrow bench that they had so faithfully adorned for so many years.

Those six beautiful young faces (counting Sweetheart in the room of Tishy) and Miss Cyntha's plain one, were painfully missed, and each neighbour looked at the one nearest, and dark rumours of scarlet fever or wholesale murder flitted about the church as Amos went steadily through the service, and read his sermon as by rote, not

once lifting the eyes that were wont to look their holiest at this gladdest, most beautiful festival of the year.

As he was sadly unrobing in the vestry, a knock came at the door, and a farmer of the neighbourhood came humbly in.

'Parson,' he said, 'no offence, I hope; but have your young gentlemen and the young lady gone away on a visit, or are they sick?'

'They went out early yesterday for a walk,' said Amos, 'and have not returned. They may have gone as far as Dartmoor and so got entangled in its bogs, but they are being searched for. My young friend, Mr. Sands, and Guy Trefusis, and several persons who have volunteered their services, are looking, and I shall join them myself as soon as afternoon service is over.'

'Don't 'ee have no service this afternoon, parson!' cried the farmer, who had heard the break in Amos's voice. 'I'll stand at t' door and send all the folks

packing home when they comes; and don't 'ee go and look for that young gell and the young gentlemen among the bogs—for you won't find 'em there, parson, as sure as I'm a man.'

'Please God,' said Amos, 'they may be safe, and perhaps I may find them at home on my return.'

'Don't 'ee look to find that,' said the farmer, shaking his heard; 'but I think they're safe enough—too safe to get back to 'ee,' he added, and looking anxiously at Amos.

The poor father's heart sank. Was worse to come? What harm could they have got into under Sweetheart's gentle guidance, these good, honest boys, who had never to his knowledge done a mean or dishonourable action in their lives?

'Parson,' said the farmer, 'I think they're just in the lock-up at some outlandish place where they don't take no more count of the Trefusis' name than if it was Snooks;

but we'll just go to bail 'em out to-morrow morning, so don't take on about it—they'll only get a bit of a fright, and it'll do 'em no harm.'

'My sons and their cousin in the lock-up?' said Amos, half-frozen with horror. 'And what can they have been doing to deserve the imprisonment of—of male-factors?'

'It's just a bit of poaching, belike,' said the farmer, soothingly. 'Lord! didn't I see her snare my turkey with my own very eyes; to be sure, he was taking a bit of a walk on the moor, and happen she thought he was wild; and the clever way she did it, and to see her knock over hares and rabbits like ninepins, and bring down birds quicker with a bit of sharp wood than if she'd got a double-barrelled gun; why, it's the most beautifullest thing I ever saw in my life; but unlawful, parson—unlawful!'

Amos stood pale and stricken, remem-

bering the hare and pheasant that he had eaten out of season, thinking them to be the gift of a man who could set even the game-laws at defiance.

'I certainly did on one occasion eat some game that I believed to be a present,' said poor Amos; 'but I have seen none since. What do they do with their—their thievings?' he added, scorning to mince the word, even for his children, or for Sweetheart.

'Eat 'em, parson, *eat* 'em!' said the farmer, briskly. 'Why, don't you see your boys are twice the men they were three weeks ago? Animal food was what they wanted (saving your pardon, parson), and animal food they've got lately, and small blame to them, and little harm enough she's done by just keeping down what in her country they looks upon as vermin.'

'But what makes you suppose they are locked up?' said Amos, feeling that now

he had got his punishment for every half-hour that the girl's sweetness and company had afforded him, and loving her all the more staunchly that she had disappointed him.

'Well, parson, I did hear a word at market-town last week how six young poachers had been as near as possible nabbed, having got on to some preserves where the keepers are right down cantankerous, and in running away through the village they met two bobbies, who tried to stop 'em. Well, the girl—for it seemed there was a girl among 'em—knocked one bobbie over like a nine-pin and doubled up t' other before he could touch her. Spry, sir!' added the farmer, tickled by an inward burst of mirth that was checked at sight of Amos standing pale and cold by the table; 'but it seems that, being a heavy man, the last bobby burst his inwards by the fall, so that those six young poachers have been "wanted" ever since. I ought to have said a word

in warning, but, Lord! I thought they was too cute to go that way again; and when I came home, and see those lanthorns bobbing around on the moor I thought nothing of it, and went to bed. But seeing the pew empty this morning, and you so cast down—why, parson, I made so bold as to up and speak, though I may be in the wrong after all.'

'Is the man seriously injured?' said Amos, his voice trembling, as he thought how upon poor Sweetheart's soul, the soul committed to his keeping, the stain of murder might lie, and how he had neglected his duty to her, and so in her ignorance she had tripped and fallen. . . . He had been remiss in taking no heed to her goings out and comings in, and the boys were young and heedless. . . . He bowed his head in bitter self-rebuke, and the farmer stood, with tears in his eyes of mingled deference and pity, and despised his own fat barn-yards, his sleek and well-fed life,

as he looked at the bowed and shrunken frame that held so patient and great a soul.

'Don't 'ee take on, sir,' he said, earnestly; 'like enough, the man's only shamming. When a policeman kills anybody it's justice, but when a man scratches a peeler it's murder, and like enough the justice 'll just admonish and send 'em home. For, Lord, sir, it's just a bit of fun to them young folks; and it's just vermin to her, as I said before, and she's that honest, why, when she found out that turkey belonged to a farm-yard, she wouldn't touch it, nor let nobody else, but just put it out on the moor where she met him, and there I found him not a morsel ate out of him but what he had ate of himself. She's as good as she's beautiful—all except for a little bust-out now and then; and the way that she've brisked and heartened you up, parson, why, you're a different man since she come.'

Amos took the man's honest hand, and pressed it.

'Thank you, my friend,' he said, 'in her name and mine I thank you. And there is no other person in my parish who has been defrauded by—by these young people?'

'Not of a ha'porth,' said the farmer, energetically; 'and you'd never have heard of that turkey but that I wanted to show you how honourable she was, and to give you a clue.'

'Where did this—this affair happen?' said Amos, who had grown paler as the farmer rambled on.

'Ten miles away as the crow flies,' said the man, shaking his head admiringly; 'only think of a young girl walking like that—and the nearest lock-up, Lord, sir, dont'ee shake so—it's more comfortable than most, a mile further on—Dunmoor.'

'That is a gaol,' said Amos, with trembling lips; 'we will go there at once.'

'I can't go with 'ee,' said the farmer, in a tone of acute disappointment. 'For I've got to stop and send off the afternoon congregation with a flea in its ear (not that they'll get more out o' me than that you've got the colic, and can't preach); but I'll cut after you on my brown pony, and get to Dunmoor not so much behind 'ee.'

'I thank you, my friend,' said Amos, taking down his warm coat and hanging it over his arm. He was shivering with excitement, but how could he wear her gift while she was a-cold out yonder with fear and pain?

'But, Lord,' said the farmer, smiting his brow as one to whom a thought has occurred, 'to-morrow's Easter Monday, and the justices don't sit, each man's safe drunk at home, and 'll be in a mad bad temper on Tuesday; the young folks 'll have to bide there till then, though p'r'aps we may hearten 'em up a bit by dropping in.'

'If the man dies,' said Amos, pausing at the vestry door which he had opened, 'she will be prosecuted for manslaughter—or murder?'

The April light streaming in through the open door fell on the worn ascetic face, the patient eager lips, the look as holy as of any of the olden-day saints, as Amos put the question.

'Manslaughter, parson, manslaughter!' said the farmer, grimly; 'and if she were 'victed, it's my belief they couldn't do nothing to her, seeing as how she's from Australia, and called' (here the farmer paused before taking a fatal plunge) 'a haboriginy!'

Amos smiled in spite of himself, then checking his unseemly merriment said,—

'I shall expect you then, neighbour, at Dunmoor in the course of the afternoon;' and went out, his tall black figure flitting among the grasses, having a chill and meagre air, as though the sunshine of the

morning neither warmed nor brought him joy.

'Talk about saints,' said the farmer, looking after him, 'why, he deserves fifty of them nimbuses, and there ain't any stained glass one that ever I saw to match him! And now for a snack and to polish of the folks going to hear Parson preaching —then out comes Durdles, and off I goes to Dunmoor.'

He amazed his wife presently by eating bread and cheese only, and drinking water at that 'snack,' for he was full of 'parson,' and how neither bite nor sup was likely to pass his lips that day.

And in fact, Amos, on leaving the churchyard, had without a thought of home made straight for Dunmoor, walking on and on as with seven-leagued boots, overweighted with the heavy coat he held on his arm, but feeling it no more than if it had been a fly.

He felt and knew neither fatigue nor

hunger; all that he desired was to reach the girl who through his negligence had been betrayed into the shedding of blood, and who was now alone and terrified—terrified by her very ignorance of the laws she had broken, and trembling at every footstep that approached her cell. She was alone, and the boys (here an impulse of anger faintly warmed him) were together. They knew better, she did not, and between their wilful leading of her into evil, and his own negligence, to this they had brought their guest.

By three o'clock he had reached the gaol of Dunmoor.

Now no matter what may be the outward dissimilarity of gaols from York to Devon, inwardly there is the same automatic precision, so that, albeit Easter Sunday, and the officials to a certain extent off guard, it took Amos some time, and by successive stages, to get at any real information about the occupants of the prison.

In his eagerness he asked only for a young girl, and there happened to be a good many young women in the gaol just then, whose misdemeanours varied from child-murder down to husband-beating.

'What name?' asked the chaplain, whom Amos had finally reached, looking at some entries in his pocket-book.

'Miss Sweetheart,' said Amos, gravely.

'Here it is,' said the governor, a practical man, who was astonished at no freaks of human beings or their nomenclature. 'The six young poachers were brought in yesterday, and five refuse their names, and they are detained here for contumacy, and the sixth—a female—on a charge of manslaughter.'

'Is the man dead?' said Amos, standing, haggard and white to the lips, his coat still on his arm.

'I should have said probable manslaughter,' remarked the governor, closing his book briskly; 'the man's not dead yet,

but his internal injuries are such that he is scarcely likely to recover.'

'May not he have received internal injuries — say from self-indulgent habits before?' said Amos, sharply. 'A push from a girl's arm could scarcely inflict such desperate injuries.'

'I have not seen her yet,' said the other, staring. 'I have no doubt she is one of those strapping Devonshire wenches who can throw a man easily in a wrestle, and the man being heavy ——'

'Policemen have no right to be heavy, sir!' said Amos, with unexpected spirit. 'What have inoffensive persons — and young slender girls to do with the unfortunate state of policemen's vitals? If they did their work properly and earnestly, they would not become heavy, sir; they would not have time for it!'

'You are of the cloth, I see, and perhaps interested in these people, and I did not catch your name,' added the governor,

staring at Amos, whose appearance at first sight had impressed him as impecunious, while the man's self-satisfaction recoiled from that look of soul in Amos, which brought the lack of his own forcibly to his mind.

'Trefusis,' said Amos, with a curt haughtiness that he instantly repented of; 'and these six poachers are my five sons and their cousin.'

The chaplain started. The name of Trefusis was one of power in that part of the world, reaching out from Cornwall far into Devon, and even investing Amos with instant dignity in his eyes.

'You would like to go to them?' he said, quickly—'to your sons, of course—five handsome lads I hear they are, but obstinate, though I understand their silence better now,' he added, with a smile.

'No—to their cousin,' said Amos, and walked out of the chaplain's room as he spoke.

His coldness increased the other's zeal, and in a very few minutes the key was turning in the lock of Sweetheart's cell, and with a gesture that sent back his guide, the door opened and closed upon Amos, who stood still as the key turned on him; then with beating heart went to the pallet upon which he knew he should find her.

The sun had dazzled his eyes as he entered; but as he drew near, he knew that for the present at least he need not have vexed his soul about her—for that she was asleep.

'He giveth his beloved sleep,' he said, inaudibly, as he kneeled beside her, and marked how without sign of guilt on her pure brow, and lovely lips, the girl slept (with no shadow of fear as one who dreaded her awakening), but with a peace and happiness stamped upon them to which Amos was a stranger.

She was sitting almost upright, but with

her head to the wall, and he sat down a little apart from her on the pallet, and waited for her to waken. He neither dreamt of hunger, nor thought of sleep for himself. With his overcoat laid carefully beside him, he sat erect, and thought of his parishioners scattered for the first time within twenty years without a word of grace; of his daughters to whom he had forgotten to send a message as to his whereabouts; of Guy and Bobbie, who were probably scouring the country in a totally opposite direction; lastly, of the farmer who, mounted on his stout cob Durdles, must now have reached the gaol.

In a side-thought he included Tishy, who was probably pouting in Cynthia's company, angry at the escapade that had drawn off her lover, while Guy, eager to set off to his Australian love, probably infused fresh vigour into the enterprise.

Some torn bits of parchment lay on the ground at his feet. Mechanically his

glance fell on them, and he knew what they were—the fragments of a marriage and of a birth certificate.

Even while his eyes rested fascinated on them—a word here and there instructing him — Yuntha woke, and seeing him, stretched out her arms with an exclamation of joy; then as suddenly drew back with a sound of pain.

'Oh, Amos!' she said, 'Amos!' and knelt beside him; 'how you must have suffered—forgive me—forgive me'—and her tears fell upon his hand as he thought of how it was always for him or for others that she troubled, but never for self!

'My dear,' he said, with trembling lips, when he had kissed her, 'it is for you that I have grieved, and all this is my fault. . . . I have neglected my duty to you, and the boys have heedlessly led you into danger.'

'No, no,' she cried, interrupting him eagerly, 'I led them. They tried often to persuade me that I must not snare or kill

the wild things we met abroad, and now I have got them all into trouble—and spoilt their holidays—poor, dear fellows!'

'They can take care of themselves,' said Amos, as he sat beside the girl, her slender hand in his. 'But, my dear'—he drew his breath almost with a sob as he looked at her—'you have innocently shed blood, and by the laws of this country you are in danger of heavy punishment.'

'Was there any spilt?' said Sweetheart, in surprise. 'I thought it was all out of sight somewhere—inside—I never saw a drop. And I only gave him a little push—the other one I knocked clean over, and he wasn't hurt a bit!'

Amos sighed, and the girl looked up quickly, seeing, as she had not done in the joy of first beholding him, that he was fasting and sore fatigued, though less by bodily than mental ills.

'Sharer had better have let me go away,' she said, slowly, a deeper misery

than his in her blue eyes. 'I have only brought trouble and disgrace upon you all; and I love you so dearly, cousin'—she broke down as she said it, and kissed his hand, not feeling worthy to put her hands round his neck. But Amos put his long thin arms about her and held her close. If he did not for a moment speak, be sure that he was praying for help or some blessing on the head above which his lips rested. Be sure that he knew as pure a soul as his was here, with his own capacity for suffering and self-abnegation; and cold, starved, and spirit-tossed as he was, he felt that he would rather be one of that humble army 'who only serve and wait' than the noblest one among those who are served.

To give—to serve—to watch—to wait—to lose self in the universal love that sublimates the meanest thing that lives, how much the greater than to be fed, waited on, to let one's mental uses rust through decay, and for ever miss the read-

ing of the grandest sermon but one ever written—the duty to one's neighbour.

Amos had been the nearest of all to the girl when she reached the Parsonage. He was nearest now, as without any thought of the boys or her people in Australia, she clung to his shelter, and for a moment forgot her sorrows.

But soon she said,—

'If he dies, will they kill me?'

'No, no,' said Amos, with a groan. 'It was an accident—they cannot kill you.'

She knew the stern law of her own country—a life for a life—and pondered a little, then said,—

'I would have liked to see the heir—in case I meet father—and there are others to be told if I die—will it be to-morrow?' she added, sitting up and looking at Amos.

'To-morrow is Easter Monday,' he said, gravely, his thoughts for the moment flying to his morning service. 'You will be

left in peace all day, and I must leave you' (he touched her head fondly) 'next day'—he hesitated, 'but before that, we can pray, and perhaps a way may be found out of our present tribulation.'

'I have prayed,' said the girl, earnestly, 'for you. When that rough man put his hand on my arm and brought me here, I did not think of the poor boys whom I had got into the scrape, and who were following us, mad with rage, but of you, and how our places would be empty in church to-day; and when we got here, I begged them not to lock up the boys, who had done no harm, but let them go home, and leave me to be punished. I have no name that anyone here would know me by, and I gave it, and they did not seem to find it odd; but the boys would not give theirs, and so they were marched away, and I have not seen them since.'

'How long have you been here?' said Amos, shrinking within himself as he

glanced round the narrow cell, the untouched bread and water on the table.

'Since yesterday afternoon,' said the girl, 'Cynthia bade us stop out late, and we came further than we had intended. But you will take the boys back with you?' she said, earnestly; 'and tell the people here I'm no real relation, only a savage come on a visit to you; then if they punish me, you will not be disgraced.'

Amos shook his head and patted her hand lovingly as he said, 'I think our half-hour must be nearly up, my dear, and I shall go now to see this poor man, and hope his injuries are less than is supposed. Perhaps they will let me come and see you again this evening, especially if there is good news. And then I shall go home to tell the girls and Guy that I have found you.'

'Guy!' she exclaimed, starting. 'The heir has come, and you never told me?'

'I had forgotten it,' he said, gravely.

'Your situation alone fills my thoughts to-day; but he came yesterday; and meanwhile my daughter had made up her quarrel with Mr. Sands, and they are going to be married some day.'

'I should like to see Guy,' said Miss Sweetheart, standing up, and her eyes shining brilliantly, 'could you not send him here? It is such a good opportunity for a little serious talk.'

Amos looked uneasy; then said, with a shade of colour on his wan cheek, 'My dear, it is not usual for young men to visit young women alone, in cells or elsewhere, and the chaplain might be surprised; if he comes I think that I must accompany him.'

'Do,' she said, eagerly; 'but why should one not be alone with a young man?' she added, looking at him gravely. 'I have been alone for days and weeks together with men,' she added after a scarcely perceptible pause.

'No doubt, my dear,' said Amos, abashed

by the purity of her eyes (though, indeed, his own were sufficiently pure); 'but over here there are certain ways and customs to which duty bids us conform; and though I may be present, I will neither listen to, nor meddle with your conversation.'

'What could I say to him that you would not say a million times better?' cried the girl, with tears in her eyes; 'or how can I expect him to listen when he finds me in prison? But he has been to my country,' she added, wistfully; 'and it is so natural to trip up an enemy over there—and it never hurts them, or their wounds heal up directly in that pure, clear air.'

'Yes,' said Amos, absently, and looking down on those torn fragments at his feet.

Yuntha caught the glance, and coloured as she stooped to gather them up, then hid them beneath the straw pillow of her bed.

'Sweetheart,' said Amos, as their eyes met, 'you have been tearing up certificates

of birth and marriage—are you wronging no one by such an act?'

She looked at him long and earnestly, then kissed his hand, and said,—

'No one.'

Steps sounded without; the governor entered, told Amos that his five sons were at liberty and waiting to return with him, their contumacy being at an end now that their name was known. He did not think it necessary to add that Sharer had refused to leave his cell till forced from it, and that with a sense of passionate misery and degradation burnt deep into their souls, the boys were silently awaiting their father in the prison-yard.

He added that Mr. Trefusis could have access to Miss Sweetheart next morning between eleven and twelve, and that on Tuesday morning the charge against her would be heard by the justices, and a favourable opinion (he hoped) be taken of the case.

Amos heard him patiently, then said,—

'There is some one I should like to bring with me to-morrow—my cousin. I hope there is no rule against this?'

The governor put on an official air, but after due consideration gave Amos permission to bring Lord Thor at any hour of the morning, noon, or night, then turned his back as Amos and his dear Sweetheart kissed each other, with a mutual 'God bless you!' worth more than any sermon the chaplain had ever preached or dreamed of.

But when Amos saw his boys, his gentle heart hardened, and even their wretched looks, and Sharer's white set face did not stir in him one pulse of pity. Curtly, he bade them go home, then led the way out himself into the free road, where he stumbled over the farmer sitting wooden, and dogged on Durdles, who had caught his master's humour, and looked wooden also.

'Thought you'd found 'em, parson,' he

said, as the boys defiled out; 'and I wouldn't go inside to be turned this way and that like a tramp—and Durdles left outside like the pox—but now you'll just get up and ride him home sharp,' added the farmer, as he jumped nimbly off and held the stirrups for Amos; 'he'll take you home like a shot; and then you'll eat something, and have a sleep, or you can't do much for her to-morrow.'

'No,' said Amos; 'I must go to that man and find out how he really is; I could not sleep without knowing.'

'Lord, parson!' said the farmer, cheerfully, 'he ain't hurt a bit. I found out the rights of it as I came along—inwards! Why, I don't believe he's got any; policemen ain't made like other folk, if you only touch 'em they pretend to go wrong, and in this case, it's drink, parson—drink, as 'll come out in the evidence o' Tuesday morning if I'm alive.'

Amos brightened as if the vice of drunk-

erness had brought him comfort; then said,—

'I wish she could know this, the poor little soul; but perhaps they would not admit me again.'

'I will tell her,' said the governor, who, unsuspected, had followed Amos out, and was inwardly quaking at this new blunder of the police, 'if only it were not Easter Monday, no doubt Miss Sweetheart would be released to-day; as it is, she shall have every indulgence.'

Amos heard no more, but leaped into the saddle, and set off at a most unclerical rate of speed, his long black coat-tails flying out over Durdles' fat haunches, his great-coat still firmly gripped under his left arm and streaming out to the breeze. He had not bestridden a beast these twenty years, and resigned his neck to Durdles—who landed him breathless at the Parsonage gate in a trifle over the half-hour. Cynthia came running out (Tishy was pouting in the

kitchen-garden and sighing for Bobbie, who, with Guy, was scouring the moors), and held Durdles while Amos stiffly alighted, and gave his news.

'Thank Heaven!' cried Cynthia, clasping her hands at the thought of the boys' speedy return; 'and as to that girl, she *deserves* to suffer for doing such criminal things.'

Amos looked at her with a condemnation that sank to her very soul; then taking Durdles' bridle, led him away.

He had scarcely gone when the young men came in, having beat the moors in vain, and with no such clue to the missing six, as Durdles' master had furnished in the vestry that morning.

Bobbie flew to the kitchen-garden, and was consoled; but Guy looked cross and fagged as he sat down in the parlour, and watched Cynthia's preparations for tea. He was burning to depart; each day set betwixt him and Yuntha seemed a lifetime.

He had consulted his *Bradshaw*, and found that a steamer sailed the very next morning for Australia, and yet he was tied here, compelled to assist in a search that others might surely conduct more efficiently than he.

'Cousin,' said Amos, coming in presently, so worn out with fatigue and hunger that he could scarcely speak, 'you can see her between eleven and twelve to-morrow morning—we will go together, and then you will be at liberty to set out for abroad as soon as you please.'

Guy's spirits rose,—by driving fifteen miles next day he could catch the night mail to town, and sail at latest on Wednesday morning.

He went out to be alone with the passionate joy of his thoughts, and when he returned, Amos had long ago retired to bed, Bobbie had departed, the sisters were whispering upstairs, and the boys invisible.

All that night he slept soundly, pursuing Yuntha through a thousand dangers and for many days—but before he woke he had found her

CHAPTER XVIII.

SAM'S SWEETHEART MEETS LORD THOR.

THE Easter Monday morning service was held by Amos at half-past eight, so that by ten o'clock he was at liberty to set out with Guy in the pony chaise that the farmer had provided for their transit.

Guy drove, and Amos guided, so that they reached the gaol without mishap soon after eleven, and were at once conducted to the cell where a young girl was restlessly walking up and down, a fever in her blood that assuredly was not there yesterday.

When she heard Amos's steps following on the turnkeys, she stopped short with her face to the door, a light that might

have honoured even Amos on brow and lip, and brightening as the heavy portal swung slowly back to admit him.

As he came forward, he seemed to hear a sharp stifled cry behind him, and then he saw how her gaze went past himself, and became fixed in a kind of horror, joy, and wonder all in one, and then came the clang of the closing door, and Amos turned only just in time to see his cousin rush to the girl, and clasp her in his arms—out of pure affection, no doubt, and because she might be first cousin (in that country where relationship is vague) to his own dearly beloved aborigine.

'*Yuntha!*' Guy had said as he leaped to her, and Amos thought the name had a curious, not to say heathenish sound; perhaps it was some generic term applied to women out yonder; but why did she recoil from name and embrace alike so violently that Guy was left alone and pale in the midst of the narrow enclosure? Mad, un-

reasoning joy had fired Guy as he leaped to her—here was a miracle, but natural as miracles are to those who experience them. She was a white woman, and after the shock to his heart, her colour attacked his brain and set it in a whirl, but her passionate repulse of his embrace moved him most of all, and made him suspect some misfortune that he had not even guessed at.

She had loved him once, and now they were free; but perhaps she did not know this, she was probably thinking of Tishy . . . and he advanced with ardour to her as she leaned her head to the wall, and said,—

'There is no living soul between us now—the girl whose picture you saw is happy with her lover, and there is no reason why I should not take you away, and marry you the day after to-morrow!'

'Out of prison?' said the girl, with a wild, fierce note in her voice, to which Amos, shrinking in the background, was a stranger; 'but how did you come here?'

she added, her voice dropping to the weakness of exhaustion; 'my cousin promised to bring the heir—I wanted to see him, to do my father's bidding by him, before I died.'

'I am Guy Trefusis,' cried the young man, and with eager arms seized her, his eyes flashing; 'there is no sin in our love now;' and he strained her to him like one who is half out of his senses with the shock of an unexpected joy.

But once more she slipped out of his arms, pale as death, and Amos, forgotten, overlooked, dreaded to hear the words that her poor white lips struggled to shape, but could not.

'Are you vexed because I am the heir?' said Guy, his passionate ardour yet unchecked by her coldness; 'it can make no difference to us and to our love—my precious, lovely, dear little Sweetheart! I think I am mad,' said the young fellow, pushing the short, bright hair from his forehead with an almost boyish gesture,

'mad with joy to find you like this, when only an hour ago you were months of days away from me, even if I ever found you at all. How pale you are, my Yuntha! but this has been too great a shock for you, and to be shut up here on that wretched charge; but it will be only for a few hours longer—and then'—(Oh! the strong leap of exultation that came into the man's voice)—'we shall be together—always together ——'

Yuntha's eyes had never left his face as he was speaking; passionate and despairing, the love in them equalled his, so that he could not doubt her faithfulness, or that her heart was less hungry than his own.

'We cannot be together,' she said, in a voice that reached no higher than a whisper, 'because—because——'

'Who shall dare to come between us?' cried Guy, passionately. 'Oh! Yuntha, Yuntha, my heart is breaking for you—come to me—come!'

He held out his arms and would have seized her, but she stepped back and said,—

'I cannot, because I am—married.'

'Married!'

Struck to stone, the full, passionate tide of love swept back in ice upon his heart, Guy stood, his arms still stretched out, his face paling to the lividness of a corpse.

'Married!' he said, in a dull voice, out of which all savour had gone, 'O God! another man's wife—his *wife*'—he caught her wrist, then dropped it, as though the touch of her flesh scorched him, then looked at her all over with a glance that seemed to loathe what it gazed upon—'and you could not wait even that short time! Who is the man?' he cried, in a voice so terrible that Amos drew nearer, thinking him actually mad with grief and passion, 'is it some Englishman, and is that the explanation of your presence here? And a few months ago, you looked at me with

love, ay *love*, in your eyes. Who is the man,—the man I say?' he cried, striking the ground with his foot, tossing his clenched hands with a gesture of frenzy above his head, 'Oh, God! how I have longed for you—suffered for you—would have soiled my honour even for your sake. Married! married! And you have never even kissed me; and always I went hungry rather than wrong you even with a thought; and some other man,—some wretch, has taken all that I dared not even think of, and you can look me in the face and tell me that you are—married!'

He drew a deep breath, looked at her once more from head to foot with blue eyes in which loathing and hatred mingled, then said,—

'I asked you who the man was—I don't want to hear or to know. I wish him joy of you, and thank God that some other man, not I, calls you his wife.'

He turned on his heel, and beat loudly

at the cell door with his clenched fist. It was opened almost instantly, and without a backward look he went out, his eyes fixed, and as one who saw nothing, or as a man may look who, having gotten his death-blow, goes a score of yards as one who knows no hurt.

When the door closed, Amos went to the girl, trembling, and took her in his arms; but she did not heed him, she was quite rigid, her blue eyes frozen and wide, apparently no impulse stirring in her to move, or cry, or speak.

'My dear,' said Amos, too nervous and appalled at the scene he had witnessed, to recover himself immediately, 'he loves you, and he is mad just now—he will come to his senses by-and-by, and be sorry.'

He sighed as he spoke, for he was vexed with the girl at what he could not choose but call deceit. If she were a married woman, what did she want in his house in

the guise of a maiden? and why had she not trusted him, as surely she might?

Here was disappointment again, and punishment for the many happy hours she had brought him; yet even while he condemned, he loved her as truly as ever, and this Yuntha knew, when at last her eyes were drawn to his face, and rested there.

'Cousin,' she said, 'I have not deceived you so much as you think. I did not know that my father's heir and the man I loved in Australia were one and the same. I sent him home to keep his engagement, and he promised to come back if she would free him, but I was betrayed into a marriage with one of the tribe—as noble, true, and gentle a man,' she added with a quiver in her voice, 'as you. He knew that my father had left me a duty to perform, and this brave fellow, though it broke his heart to part from me, bade me come home and do it. And now' (her voice sank) 'I will go back to him, and the heir will do his

duty, and perhaps it is well that he . . . hates me, for now he will soon forget me.'

Amos, plunged without warning into a tragedy that had scarcely allowed him breath with which to watch it, had grown calmer as the girl's simple recital reached his ears.

'My dear,' he said, gently, 'I do not think that you have willingly deceived any one, and you came to fulfil your father's wishes, and were not bound to give any account of your previous life. Unprotected, he sent you to a strange country, but that you have been pure and innocent, I do not doubt; and, then, Guy loves you so, and he could not have loved any one unworthy, though, to be sure, he tried to love one worthy young woman—my daughter—and failed. Just now he is mad with grief, but presently he will be sorry. And I have forgotten to tell you my good news,' he went on, with a sad effort at cheerfulness; 'the

man whom you accidentally injured is recovering, and to-morrow, after a purely formal inquiry into the affair, you will be released.'

'And then I can go home,' she said, in the dull voice of one from whom all hope has fled.

'To be sure,' said Amos. 'Indeed the house is cold now you are away; we are all wretched, and the boys will neither eat, drink, nor sleep.'

'Poor boys!' she said, thinking of them as belonging to some half-forgotten portion of her existence; 'but I shall not go back to them . . . . if I am let out from here, you will lend me some money, and I shall go straight to him.'

'Your husband?' said Amos, with a sternness before which even a guilty thought might have quailed.

'Who else?' she said; 'he is blind—I meant only to stay a little while, and go back to him—and no, since *he* came

to-day, there is less delay than I expected, for how could I remain to play the spy upon him? And some day, perhaps (tell the boys), I will come back to them—and you.'

She kissed him with the real solemn kiss of farewell, as she ended her words, and there were not many more words between them before he left, intent on obtaining by next morning the money that should set her towards her duty, and beyond the passionate influence of her lover.

The chaplain thought Amos only a degree less mad than Guy, as the clergyman came out, and, almost flying in his haste, never stopped till he got outside the prison, where he found the farmer immovable on Durdles, the empty chaise waiting at a little distance.

'Neighbour,' said Amos, instantly, 'can you lend me a hundred pounds or thereabouts?'

'A thousand, parson,' said the man, heartily; 'if I hadn't got 'em, I'd borrow 'em—but you ain't thinking of bailing her out?' he added, reproachfully; 'she'll be out safe enough through the door of justice, to-morrow morning!'

'No, no,' said Amos, hunting distractedly in his pockets; 'but I want the money; and I've got a bit of paper here, a sort of security, and you'll kindly keep it, neighbour, till I've paid you back.'

He had found the bank-bill for a thousand pounds by now, and handed it to the farmer, who received it with amazement; then, seeing the almost bewildered state of Amos, folded it in his pocket-book, and stolidly alighting from Durdles' back, set him loose; then, escorting Amos to the chaise, himself assumed the reins, and drove 'parson' home.

Whatever might have been the result of their confab on the way, next morning the farmer was in his 'shay' at the gate

before Amos had well bolted his porridge, or heard a quarter of his daughters' marvellings at Guy's sudden disappearance.

Tishy was inclined to think that he had been fonder of her than she supposed, and this pleasing doubt made her lovelier than ever, when presently (with Bobbie's assistance) she concocted the letter to Mrs. Transome that announced the wreck of all that fine lady's hopes.

Cynthia, scowled on by the boys, overlooked by her father, had not courage to follow him as he hurried out; but Sharer, whose young face had aged years in the past two days, went with him, and said,—

'Father, you're going to her; may I come too?'

Amos looked at the boy, and the farmer nodded, so that Sharer jumped up behind, and three, instead of two, went to Dunmoor that morning. When the proceed-

ings in court were over, when the girl had been triumphantly cleared of the trumped-up charge, and left the court, as the judge said (while he looked about in search of Lord Thor), 'without a stain on her character,' the two men and the boy drove with Yuntha to a seaport town many miles away, and after a night's rest, in which none of the four slept much, embarked a young girl for Australia, who went with weeping, and even kissed the honest farmer once before the ship sailed. They had bought her such things in the place as their masculine wits suggested for a young girl's comforts, among them being a bottle of Mountain Dew, and prescribed by the farmer as a certain cure for sea-sickness, and perhaps another sort of pain at which Amos had faintly hinted at.

Dearly as she loved Sharer, it was to Amos that she clung longest when the final moment of parting came; his was

the sorest heart (with the pitiful soreness of age) when the cables parted, and the great ship set sail.

It was on him that her straining gaze was last bent, for him that her lips moved in the words of blessing that he had taught her . . . . while he, as the ship receded, knew that he had lost the angel of comfort and peace that had tarried for so brief a while by his hearth. . . . . the sobs of his boy, broken down beyond the strength of early manhood, hurt so much less than this silence in his heart, this emptiness in his ears—her message of love spoken, her care of him over, the joy of her presence gone from him, and one place beside him for ever empty.

So, with aching gaze, his eyes followed the good ship till she faded on the horizon—so he and others mourned her, their lost sweetheart, their gentle love; but who that watched those silvern sails

might say that hope was dead, nor dream that a homeward ship might not bring back to the hearts that loved her, Sam's Sweetheart?

CHAPTER XIX.

On the very morning of the day that Sam's Sweetheart sailed, a man knocked at the door of the Rev. Amos' house, and asked for the Countess of Thor.

'There ain't one,' said Sal, with her arms a-kimbo, and a broad grin on her face that widened as she looked at the man before her, 'she's given *him* the go-by, and done better; she's suited herself, and means to be plain Mrs. Bobbie—and good luck to her!'

'She is going to be married?' said the visitor, starting back.

'That's the size of it,' said Sal, nodding;

'and the sooner the better, for they're just *doited* with love—me and my man is nothing to 'em!'

'Where is she?' said the visitor, faintly, and as one in a dream.

'Kissing in the back garden,' said Sal, 'though everybody's out, and they might have the parlour. Would you like to see 'em?' she added, and opened the door wider, and stumped into the sitting-room, 'there they be—nigh as happy as me and my man are o' Sundays!'

The uncouth visitor followed. Often as he had pictured Yuntha in her English life, it had never been in this situation, and he hesitated before his eyes followed the direction pointed out by a red arm, and to which his eyes slowly travelled only to rebound, as it were, from them to honest Sal.

'That's not the Countess of Thor!' he cried; 'and to be sure I might have known she wouldn't demean herself so—but where's the real one?' he added, sharply, and turn-

ing to the woman who stood agape, thinking that the skies had fallen on the Parsonage during the past three days.

'There ain't none,' she said at last; 'didn't I tell you my young missus had changed her mind, and wouldn't be a countess at no price?'

'She never had the chance,' said the stranger, with a lofty air that sat oddly on him; 'but, pray, do you know anybody that corresponds to the name of Sam's Sweetheart?'

'Ay, well enough,' said the woman, and tears came into her honest eyes. 'She's been the angel of the house—and now she's gone——'

'Gone!' said the man, starting back, then seizing Sal's arm, shook it; 'where has she gone, and who took her?'

'She went just by her lone self,' said Sal, wiping her eyes. 'She'd got friends in her own country, she said, though to be sure she's got enough here—and so when

they let her out o' gaol, she just went—and there's her box upstairs staring you in the face, so as it makes you cry to see it.'

'Out of gaol?' said the man, slowly, as one stricken, 'and who put her there, I should like to know?'

'Lord,' said Sal, 'she only poached a bit here and there, just to fill them boys' hungry stomachs. But Saturday she got nabbed with the young gentlemen, and when they let her out, she just took a ship home—and if it weren't for them lovers, and my own man liking something cheerful in a female,' added Sal, shaking her head, 'I'd be just dead with crying this minute.'

But her questioner scarcely heard her—his ugly face was set hard in thought, and his next question was as to how he might best get to a port whence he might sail for Australia.

Sal gasped again; how should she know? she whose horizon was bounded by a hay-

stack, a church, a kitchen, and a country fair?

'I'll ask Mr. Bobbie,' she said; but even as she spoke, a step sounded on the threshold, and Guy Trefusis came into the room.

He looked as if he had neither broken his fast, slept, nor changed his clothes for some nights; he was wild and haggard-looking to the verge of madness; and when he saw Billy, recognising him through all his disguise of English dress, he started back, as one who knows himself the victim of a delusion.

'How do you do, sir?' said Billy, shocked at the change in the young man, and instantly connecting it in his mind with Yuntha's departure.

'It's my Lord Thor,' said Sal, in a loud whisper, and with a jerk of her elbow into Billy's ribs as she retired, and left the two men together.

Guy burst out laughing as the door

shut; and he came close and looked at Billy.

'So you have kept your word,' he said; 'you said you would come after her, and you are here. But I didn't bring her—God knows how she got here; but she contrived to get married on the way.'

Billy said nothing; at present everything was in a state of topsy-turvy; but when matters had settled themselves down a bit, he would speak.

'Good God!' cried Guy, striking his forehead like a madman; '*married*—did she meet another white man, and transfer her affections to him—could she not have waited awhile to see if I would come back? On the very day that I meant to start in search of her, to make her my wife, I found her in England—found her—*married!* No doubt she is with him now—and they are laughing together at the poor fool who—who——'

'No,' said Billy, in a curiously hushed

voice; 'there was never very much of laughing between them, and there's not much chance of their laughing together at you now.'

'So you know the man?' cried Guy, his burning eyes devouring Billy's face; 'perhaps you knew of him before you knew me?'

'Yes,' said Billy, still in that sad, subdued way; 'and a truer, nobler *gentleman* never walked the earth.'

'I am glad she is so fortunate,' said Guy, coldly; 'if one is to be supplanted, it is as well to be by a better man. But being so happy with him, what did she want in England?'

'To do her duty,' said Billy. 'To be sure it's a queer business all round, and bangs creation into fits; but to begin at the beginning—*she's* the Countess of Thor, and you're Mr. Guy Trefusis.'

'Does she not take her husband's name?' said Guy, bitterly; 'though why should she? Our best-bred Englishwomen are

very rarely of the same name as the men they have married—but pray how is she the Countess of Thor?'

'John Trefusis married her mother by book and bell,' said Billy, slowly, 'leastways in church at Sydney; and when his child was born, he got a stray parson to christen it, so that he'd got two certificates nearly good enough for any court of law. He got tired of the mother after a bit, and she just poisoned herself quietly, and no bones made about it; and off goes John Trefusis when he'd buried her down to the camp, where he was gold digging, p'r'aps forgetting the child—p'r'aps meaning to go back next day and look after it. Meantime Sam had got an idea into his slow head, and he followed it up—found the child, hid her safe, stole the dockyments John Trefusis always carried in his breast-pocket, and paid for his theft with his life. But long before he died he'd told Triangular Bob the bearings of the situation, and how he was to

send her safe to England where she'd come into her estate one of these days, and, according to Sam's ideas, live "hon'able." But things turned out different. She was stolen on the road by a native woman (or so she seemed), and the gold went on to Sydney, but Sam's Sweetheart was gone; so was Triangular Bob; but I found her at last—though with no more chance of getting her away than if she was in a dungeon at the bottom of a fortress. So I just stuck, (having first dyed myself a beautiful chocolate brown) and taught her morsel by morsel till she knew as much English as I did. Triangular Bob had disappeared. But I'd always that fixed idea that some day she and I would run away, and get to England, so we found out a hiding-place to which we might run. Only somehow, as time went on, I seemed to see that Sam had been wrong, and she would be happiest where she was—and married to the man who loved her.'

'Who was the man?' cried Guy, swift as lightning.

'Djarrah,' said Billy, sadly. 'Hadn't she humanized, and improved him so that he'd lost all the vices of the savage, and never picked up one of the whites'? And she was born with all the wild tastes in her; and the more I thought of it, the more I made up my mind to let things slide—more especially as Triangular Bob had mizzled, and there weren't no deeds by which we could prove nothing; and why should I send her back to be slighted by Cucumber Jack's family over here? So I told her the white men were a bad lot, and she believed me till you came; but after that it was all up, and she thought me a liar, and saved you; and when once the tribe was up and after her, I thought the safest place for her was England, and asked you to take her there, meaning to join you.'

'She refused to come,' said Guy Trefusis, bitterly, 'or to let me stay—but no doubt she had her reasons.'

'Yes, reasons enough,' said Billy, indignantly. 'She'd got a blind man to look after, without mentioning a father and a grandmother to bury.'

'So she buried her father?' exclaimed Guy.

'To be sure,' said Billy, drily; 'but first he gave her the dockyments, short and sweet; but she was that hon'able she never looked inside 'em, for he told her not to, till she got to England.'

'And did she drop her husband by the way?' said Guy, with a fierce sneer; 'and if she never looked inside them, how do you know their contents?'

'Through another party,' said Billy, drily, 'namely, Triangular Bob. We crossed each other's tracks the very day after she'd sailed for England; but there were reasons why he couldn't go after her, and for my part I had got my work cut out for me; so when we'd had a long talk, we parted.'

'And where was the husband?' said Guy, savagely; 'why did he not go with her?'

'I'm coming to that,' said Billy, slowly, and turning a look of reproach upon Guy; 'but if he'd wanted to, he couldn't have protected her, for he was blind.'

'Blind!' Guy stood still, struck with the exultant thought that all her exquisite loveliness, her blushes, her maidenly charms, were wasted on a man who was blind.

'And she loves him?' he exclaimed.

'She has loved him all her life,' said Billy, doggedly; 'but what's the good of keeping up riddles? You've seen him often; he was her cousin.'

'*Djarrah!*' cried Guy, as one who guesses wildly at truth.

'Who else?' said Billy, with some coldness: 'they were promised to each other from their youth, and when you broke the trust I put in you to take her home——'

'She refused to come,' said Guy, striding about the room; 'or at least she would not marry me, and remain *there*——'

'P'r'aps you were ashamed of her,' said Billy, with some scorn, 'and she weren't one to be despised, though she *did* set out as humble and modest as a beggar-maid, with her clothes and box labelled "Sam's Sweetheart."'

'So she loved her husband well enough to *leave* him!' said Guy, facing Billy, with eyes that might have forced truth from the least natural man living.

'Ay,' said Billy, stolidly, 'and she's loved him well enough to go back to him—only it's too late.'

'Why?'

'Because he is dead.'

Once more that horrible impulse to laughter tickled Guy. Yuntha was a *widow*, bound by unforgettable ties to a savage; she, whom he had dreamed of night and day as his pure, his unsullied love!

'You mean to follow her?' he said harshly. 'Well, the sooner you bring her back the better. We will change places; *she*

shall take her proper position here, *I* will take my chance of existence over there.'

'Then you'd best stay where you are for the present,' said Billy drily, 'for I'm going to start after her by the next boat that sails, and meetings might be more or less 'orkerd under the circumstances.'

'Spare yourself any anxiety on that point,' said Guy, turning on his heel; 'there are other places in the world besides Australia and England.'

'Plenty of 'em,' said Billy curtly, 'but in the whole biling of 'em, you won't find but one Sam's Sweetheart. Now just listen to me, sir,' he added, in a stern and altogether different tone; 'life's too short for misunderstandings, so the sooner you get the real bearings of the situation the better. I told you she was a widow, but that ain't strictly true, for she was never a wife.'

Guy laughed loud and long.

'Are you trying to patch up a story to satisfy me?' he said. 'Spare yourself the

trouble; whether she is legally or illegally married, it is one and the same thing to me.'

'Wasn't I her bridesmaid, so to speak?' said Billy wrathfully, 'didn't I get there in the very nick of time, just as that ridiculous pretence of a marriage was over? And to be sure it used to be the fashion for honeymooning folks to take a bridesmaid with 'em, and deadly dull she must have found it, since it didn't seem exactly moral to take the groom's-man too.'

'For God's sake get on with your story,' cried Guy. 'But what is there to tell? She was *married*, and there's an end of it.'

'Not she!' said Billy, stubbornly; 'not even according to the customs of the tribe she's lived among these fifteen years. She was just as free to marry anybody she likes as I am—leastways if my wife ain't alive.'

'You speak in riddles,' cried Guy, 'riddles that are beyond either my patience or my comprehension.'

'It's no riddle,' said Billy, 'but simple enough. Djarrah only pretended to marry her to save her from the vengeance of the tribe, and they were just brother and sister, and no more, from first to last.'

'But she considered herself married to him,' cried Guy, still unsatisfied, and without conscious gratitude for the awful weight uplifted from his soul. 'She told me so with her own lips two days ago—and how she must go back to him.'

'Ay, poor soul!' said Billy, sadly, 'with him and her it was just which could beat the other at honour—never were there two such souls, and by his very infirmity, she felt bound to stand by and tend him. It might have half broke your heart to hear 'em talk—she so eager to serve him, and he so hungry for a bit of love. I can't but think that he'd always clung to the hope she'd forget you in time, and go to him *willing*—for he was that proud, the poor savage, he'd have scorned to take her else,

and even when he'd urge her to go to England to do the duty her father had left her, I could see that he tried to make himself believe she'd come back, as she said she would; and at last he got that feverish and restless like (for he was just worn out with love, and his struggle to keep it down) that she made up her mind to go, "For the sooner that is," said she, "the sooner I'll be back." And when she was well over the fever, we set out for Bathurst, and all along the way, she'd sigh and sigh, seeming to recollect this and that; and Djarrah seemed to know what she was thinking of, and how she'd gone this way before, but with somebody else, and I could see how every day he got thinner, and his hand more burning: but *she* never seemed to see nothing, she was so full of her journey, and of how soon she could get back again. She made me promise to stay with him, and once when we were alone she said,— "It is only a coward who would fear a

brave true man . . . but you'll stay with us always, Billy, when I come back?"

'And then I knew that she was afraid Djarrah's patience might break down, for she was that honourable, she felt herself bound to him, and no archbishop and twenty-four bridesmaids could have made her feel more married to him than she did then.'

Guy had turned to the window, where he stood motionless, his back giving Billy no clue to his thoughts.

'Well, we took her to the lawyers her father wrote to, and I guess we kicked up a bit of a dust in the street when we went through, all three in 'possum rugs, and he and she, the most beautiful pair of savages ever seen—if you can find me their match in white folks, I'm a Dutchman. But you can't astonish lawyers, and they just rigged her out like lightning, had her box labelled, and by twelve o'clock the day but one after, Djarrah and I were standing on the deck of a homeward-bound ship.

'She put her arms round his neck, and for the first time that I had ever seen her do it, kissed his mouth, and his poor blind eyes—and he kissed her cheek, and her little hand, and "I'll come back, Djarrah," said she. But he made her no answer, and then the bell rang, and she wished him good-bye, and I took him away. He strained his eyes after the ship as it sailed away, and when she waved her hand, he lifted his just as if he saw her; and it's my belief he *did*,' added Billy in solemn tones, 'for he told me afterwards he had seen her plainly, and how she looked, and what she wore.

'Well, we worked back somehow to the huts we'd lately occupied, about fifty miles as the crow flies from Bathurst. Our huts were about two hundred yards apart; but when we got home, and I was busy cooking a damper, and making tea, all at once I saw Djarrah had disappeared. I thought he was snaring a bit of flesh for

supper, but time went by, and he didn't come back, so I went to look for him.

'All night I looked, and searched, never dreaming of his being anywhere near home, but by morning I found him . . . face downwards on the ground beside her empty bed—for the great heart had broken at last, and he was dead.

* * * *

'I buried him next day at sundown, then I set the huts in order, so that if by chance she came back, she'd only think Djarrah and I'd gone hunting (though I felt certain sure to find her in England), and then I just made tracks for Bathurst, falling in on the way with no less a person than Triangular Bob. He was always a poor sort of creature except at nursing,' said Billy, shaking his head, 'and muddling about in the bush hadn't improved his wits. He'd lost the trail of Sam's Sweetheart where I struck it, and had never so much as glimpsed that precious creature from the

time Monana stole her from the waggon, though he'd got as gray as a badger looking for her, and watching over them dockyments that meant the inheritance of Sam's Sweetheart. Well, it's too long a tale to tell, but Cucumber Jack got 'em at last, and hadn't kept 'em a dozen hours, when he met his daughter, and before he died, had handed 'em over, telling her not to open 'em till she got to England. What she's done with them same, the Lord knows,' added Billy, briskly, 'and p'r'aps in a court of law they'd say the marriage wasn't legal, though a clergyman tied the knot. And now, having made all these explanations (which explanations are always odorous), I'm just off to jine the Countess, and you can follow or not, as *you* please.'

CHAPTER XX.

L'Envoi.

A slender shape in rain-sodden, wind-beaten English dress, went stealing through the bush, late on one of those June days that in Australia correspond with those of our December. Often she shivered as if the cold northern wind blew on her very heart, and often sighed, and looked behind, yet as one who expected none to follow; and when at last she came to the rude hut that was her destination, she shrank back and put one arm before her eyes, as if through the darkness she saw some sight beyond at which her soul sickened.

But if she trembled, she was made of stuff too stern for hesitation; and if her hand faltered as she pushed aside the entrance to the hut, her foot did not linger on the threshold that she had travelled so many thousands of miles to cross.

But just within it, she stopped, struck by a nameless desolation and silence in the air that seemed to speak of the long absence of its master . . . for this was Djarrah's hut, to which she had come straight as to her future home, to be eyes and hands to him, and in all things wife to the man whom by every law, human and divine, she recognised as her husband.

But the hearth was cold, and he must have been long away . . . . was he abroad on some long hunting expedition with Billy, or had they thought she would love her English life so well, that her return was not to be looked for till many days had gone by?

From here he had gone, blind and alone,

to Bathurst, to deliver those papers that she had been commanded by John Trefusis to make over to his solicitors, and that before the fever wholly seized her, she had been able to give into his charge. Hither he had returned, and dwelt alone through the long weeks of her illness and slow recovery; here he had battled with his heart, and having her entirely at his mercy, had yet so held his passions in leash that gradually the exceeding fear of him had left her, and she had departed unwillingly enough to fulfil the duty she had promised to her father. And if at parting his sightless eyes had held no hope of her return, she had known her own heart, and kissed him less as one who parts in despair, than as one who sees a sure day of reunion beyond.

And now she was here. She had come back to him, and her mere presence in his hut on his return would explain without words how complete was her self-surrender. . . .

Hark! what was that?

Through the sodden leaves, the sobbing wind without, she heard sounds of human approach and sank down on her knees, shuddering in every limb; for were not those the bridegroom's steps that, however flaggingly, were bringing him straight to his bride? . . . The murmur of voices reached her, and one of them was Billy's; and whose hand but Djarrah's should thrust aside so boldly the entrance to the hut in which she knelt, crying out in the midst of duty a long, passionate farewell to Guy?

She dared neither to look up nor to breathe, as those light steps drew near to where she knelt; then, with a piteous cry of '*Djarrah!*' she rose, and stepping back from the two eager arms that would have snatched her, by some sudden intuition knew that this was her bridegroom indeed, and that without sin, or shame, or sorrow she might go to him . . . while a man who

listened without knew that at last peace, and love, and happiness, were for ever secured to her whom they had called 'Sam's Sweetheart.'

THE END.

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